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World's largest democracy goes to polls today

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Polling for the first phase of Lok Sabha elections is set to take place today in which more than 1,600 candidates, including eight Union ministers, two former chief ministers and an ex-governor will test their electoral fate.

As many as 102 parliamentary constituencies across 21 states and Union territories will go to polls in the first phase which is also the largest of the seven phases of the elections.

Separately, voting will also be held for 92 assembly seats in the state elections in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim on Friday.

Of the 102 Lok Sabha seats, BJP had won 39 in 2019, with the ruling alliance NDA bagging 12, five and three of them in Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and West Bengal, respectively. The BJP's existing allies hold seven of them.

Voting will begin at 7am and end at 6pm, though the closure

PHOTO: PTI

of poll timings differs in some seats. Election Commission has deployed over 18 lakh polling personnel across 1.87 lakh polling stations where over 16.63 crore voters will exercise their franchise.

Voters include 8.4 crore men, 8.23 crore women and 11,371 third gender. There are as many as 35.67 lakh first time voters, besides 3.51 crore young voters in the age group of 20-29 years.

A total of 41 helicopters, 84 special trains and nearly one lakh vehicles have been deployed to ferry polling and security personnel, the poll panel pointed out. Webcasting will be done in more than 50 per cent of the polling stations along with deployment of micro observers in all polling stations. Additionally, 361 observers -- 127 general, 67 police and 167 expenditure observers -- have already reached their constituencies days before the polls. They will serve as the eyes and ears of the Commission. Special observers have also been deployed in certain states.

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar has been leading the preparations for the Lok Sabha elections for the past two years. He had led a conference of state Chief Electoral officers at Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration. Aiming to enhance voter turnout, ahead of the polling, the poll panel had also organised a conference on low voter turnout with focus on parliamentary constituencies with a history of low poll participation in previous elections. *—PTI*

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Sanctity needed: SC to EC on EVM-VVPAT

SC reserves verdict on pleas seeking ballot

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Underscoring the importance of voter satisfaction and trust in the electoral system Supreme Court on Thursday said "there has to be sanctity in the electoral process". The apex court said this in response to petitioners who sought its direction to go back to using ballot papers instead of Electronic Voting Machines (EVM). The court asked Election Commission of India to explain in detail the steps followed to ensure free and fair polls.

Election Commission said it was pained by what was said about the VVPAT slips in Supreme Court.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, which reserved its verdict on a batch of pleas seeking complete cross-verification of votes cast using EVMs with Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT), said over suspicion of everything is a problem. The VVPAT is an independent vote verification system which enables electors to see whether their votes have been cast correctly. Senior advocate Santosh Paul, appearing for one of the petitioners, said several developed countries have gone back to using ballot papers in elections. The bench made the remarks when advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for petitioner NGO 'Association for Democratic Reforms' (ADR), sought reversal of the poll panel's 2017 decision to replace the transparent glass on VVPAT machines with an opaque glass through which a voter can see the slip only when the light is on for seven seconds. "At least the bulb which glows for seven seconds should be allowed to glow continuously after the button is pressed in the EVM," Bhushan pleaded. "Whether it's transparent or translucent glass on a VVPAT machine or the glowing of a bulb, ultimately it is the voter's satisfaction and trust," the bench said.

It said, "Everything cannot be suspected." "Paper ballots have huge drawbacks and we don't want to think about it. Instead, we were thinking of using barcodes for political parties in future but that would be a humongous task." Advocate Maninder Singh said EVMs are standalone machines and cannot be tampered with but possibility of human error cannot be ruled out. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Reports of extra EVM vote for BJP false: ECI counters its official in SC

Election Commission of India on Thursday countered its own official and told Supreme Court that allegations of EVM showing one extra vote during a mock poll in Kerala's Kasaragod were false. However, Returning Officer (RO) of Kasaragod confirmed that there was a malfunction in the EVMs and it has resolved the issue. The RO told Supreme Court that at the time of "self-checking", four EVMs printed out an additional slip other than the usual slips. *—Salar News*

KCET BEGINS

Students and parents at Malleshwaram PU college as the KCET exams started in Bengaluru on Thursday. The exam saw a record number of 3.5 lakh students. The test was held at 737 centres across the State, of which 167 centres were located in Bengaluru **MOHAMMED ASAD**

Mandya man kills wife, 2 kids over illicit relationship

MANDYA, 18 APRIL

A man allegedly killed his wife and two children by giving them water laced with poison in Mandya on Thursday. The accused is Narasimha from Nagamangala town, Mandya district. Narasimha also tried to kill himself. The victims are Keertana, 23; Jayasimha, 4; and Rishika, 1. According to the police, Narasimha, who runs a hair dressing salon, often had disputes with his wife over an alleged illicit relationship. While the two children died on the way to hospital, Keerthana died at Nagamangala taluk hospital. Narasimha is currently undergoing treatment. Nagamangala rural police has registered a case. ***—Salar News***

Indefinite shutdown in East Nagaland ahead of polls

KOHIMA, 18 APRIL

Hours before the Lok Sabha elections are due to begin in Nagaland, ENPO, has asked people not to vote in the polls to press for its demand for a separate state, imposed indefinite total shutdown from 6pm on Thursday. Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO) is the apex body of seven tribal organisations. The polls to the lone Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland will begin on 7am on Friday. ENPO, however, exempted government servants on poll duty and emergency services from it. It, however, also cautioned that if any person goes to vote and any law and order situation arises, it will be the responsibility of the voter concerned. ***—PTI***

US, UK issue new sanctions on Iran for attack on Israel

WASHINGTON, 18 APRIL

US and UK on Thursday imposed a new round of sanctions on Iran as concern grows that Tehran's unprecedented attack on Israel could fuel a wider war in Middle East. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control targeted 16 people and two entities in Iran that produce engines that power the drones used in the 13 April attack on Israel. Additionally, the UK is targeting several Iranian military organizations, individuals and entities involved in Iran's drone and ballistic missile industries. "We will continue to deploy our sanctions authority to counter Iran with further actions in the days and weeks ahead," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a statement. ***—AP***

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Girl hacked to death in Hubballi college

HUBBALLI, 18 APRIL

A 24-year-old student was hacked to death by an assailant inside a college campus on Thursday.

The victim Neha Hiremath, daughter of Hubballi Congress corporator Niranjanaiah Hiremath, was studying in the first year of MCA at BVB College in the City.

While returning from the college, an assailant suddenly attacked and killed her by stabbing multiple times. Neha was immediately admitted to KIMS hospital by classmates.

Soon after the stabbing, the accused fled the campus with the knife in his hand. The police arrested the accused

Victim Neha Hiremath and accused Fayaz **PHOTO: SALAR**

Fayazz from Soudatti in Belagavi district.

According to authorities, Fayazz was a senior student at the same college as Neha. Neha was reportedly being pestered by the accused for many months.

He had also proposed to her recently which was rejected by the victim. Angered by her move, the accused was planning to murder Neha.

Police said that the accused had said to his friends that he will finish the girl who has rejected his offer. ABVP and BJP have decided to protest in front of the college.

—Salar News

Sugar in baby food: India probes Nestle

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

The Centre has taken cognisance of the charges made against multi-national food company, Nestle of adding sugar to infant food products in India.

The investigation done by Public Eye, a Swiss investigative organisation reveals that despite stringent guidelines by the World Health Organization's (WHO) banning added sugars in baby food products, Nestle's baby food product Cerelac has been found to contain an average of nearly 3g of sugar per serving in India.

India's food regulator FSSAI is examining the report and will place it before the scientific panel.

Meanwhile, Nestle said it has reduced added sugar in baby food products in India by over 30 per cent depending on variants over the past five years. Nestle India asserted that its "infant cereal products are manufactured to ensure the appropriate delivery of nutritional requirements such as protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, iron etc. for early childhood".

The report, however, says Nestle has violated WHO

Nestle said it has reduced added sugar in baby food products in India by 30% **PHOTO: FREEPIK**

guidelines against adding honey or sugar in baby food products not only in India but also in many Asian, African and Latin American countries.

The report further finds that Nestle was not following the WHO guidelines in poor countries, but was seemingly favouring higher-income countries. "Cerelac wheat-based cereals for six-month-old babies sold by Nestle in Germany and the United Kingdom have no added sugar, while the same product contains over 5g per serving in Ethiopia and 6g in Thailand," the study said.

A recent WHO study found that over 11 per cent of Indians are diabetic and 35.5 per cent suffer from hypertension.

—ANI

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RAIN BRINGS RELIEF TO RAMANAGARA

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

After a prolonged dry spell lasting 148 days, residents of Harohalli in Ramanagara, located just South of Bengaluru, welcomed a brief respite with slight rainfall.

This welcome change in weather comes amidst predictions by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) for light to moderate rain in parts of Bengaluru Urban and Bengaluru Rural districts. The anticipation for rain has been met with mixed feelings, as some express concerns about the impact of sporadic rainfall. While one user on X said "It's better with no rains than some sprinkles which will make it sultry & horrible heat." Despite the anticipation, IMD scientists cautioned that not all parts of Bengaluru would receive significant rainfall. This selective precipitation underscores the unpredictability of weather systems, leaving communities to navigate through varying degrees of climatic extremities. Mysuru also received its first spell of rain since more than three months, on Thursday.

—Salar News

TALE OF TWO MURDERS

Woman kills daughter's murderer in City

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

In a case of double murder in Bengaluru, a 24-year-old woman was allegedly stabbed to death by her acquaintance who later died on the spot after he was hit with a stone by the woman's mother at Jayanagar area here on Thursday, police said.

The deceased are Anusha and 44-year-old Suresh. They had known each other for five years, they said.

Investigation revealed that the Anusha and Suresh had an altercation in the park because she had begun distancing herself from him, which he did not take well. She did not want

Anusha and Suresh reportedly had a fight in Jayanagar park **PHOTO: SALAR**

to have any association with him, the police said.

They met at the park where he allegedly stabbed her twice.

Before stepping out of her house, Anusha had informed her mother that she was going to meet someone in the park for five minutes and would be back soon. Suspecting that something was amiss, the mother followed her daughter to the park and ended up witnessing Anusha being stabbed in front of her, he said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Lokesh Bharamappa Jagalasar said that Anusha and Suresh were killed around 4.45 pm at Sarakki Park in Jayanagar.

"Suresh stabbed Anusha. Anusha's mother rushed to save her and in that bid, she hit Suresh on his head with a stone and he died on the spot. We are currently interrogating an eyewitness in the case," he said.

"Both of them knew each other from their workplace. Anusha was a caretaker, while Suresh worked for an event management company," the DCP said. *—PTI*

Woman cadet, on vessel seized by Iran, back home

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

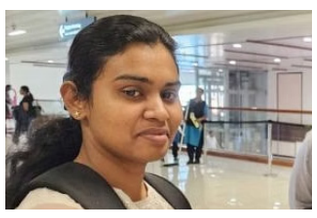


PHOTO: PTI

Ann Tessa Joseph, a woman cadet who was among the 17 Indians on-board container vessel MSC Aries that was seized by Iranian military over the weekend, returned to Cochin on Thursday.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Thursday said the Indian mission in Tehran is in touch with the remaining 16 Indian crew members of the container vessel.

"With the concerted efforts of the Indian mission in Tehran and the Iranian government, Indian deck cadet Ms Ann Tessa Joseph from Thrissur, Kerala, who was among Indian crew members of container vessel MSC Aries, has landed safely at the Cochin International Airport today afternoon," it said.

At the airport, Joseph was received by the regional passport officer.

"Indian mission in Tehran remains seized of the matter and is in touch with the remaining 16 Indian crew members of the container vessel," MEA said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Actor Darshan campaigns for Cong in Mandya

MANDYA, 18 APRIL

Popular actor Darshan has hit the campaign trail in Mandya constituency, not on behalf of any political party but to support Star Chandru, a Congress candidate. Addressing a gathering in Halagur, Darshan clarified his intentions, stating, "I have consistently said that I won't campaign for any political party. I'm here to campaign for an individual. I haven't forgotten Narendraswami's help from five years ago. Even though MLA Uday said Sumalatha didn't get the ticket, I'm here because Chandru asked me to be. I urge everyone to vote for him." They celebrated his presence by showering him with a massive rose flower garland, which was specially arranged by a crane. Darshan had supported BJP MP Sumalatha during last election. Reacting to Darshans canvassing JD(S) leader and former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy said there is nothing wrong with actor Darshan campaigning for Congress. Speaking to reporters in Shivamogga on Thursday, he said, "In a democracy anyone can campaign for anyone. They are doing their duty." *—Salar News*

PHOTO: THE HINDU

Wild tusker captured in Hassan

HASSAN, 18 APRIL

Forest department officials on Thursday captured a wild tusker , which had been attacking humans. The tusker known as 'killer forest bear,' was captured in the IBC coffee plantation of Watehalli in Belur taluk on Wednesday. Led by Abhimanyu, a team of eight elephants, including Prashantha, Sugriva, Karnataka Bhima, Ashwatthama, and Mahendra, successfully carried out the operation. It first attacked a labourer named Vasant on 4 January near Mattavar in Belur taluk. Later it carried out multiple attacks in Sakaleshpur area. Videos capturing the terrifying chases by the elephant went viral, adding to the panic. The tusker attacked again on 15 February near Hosagadde in Sakaleshpur taluk, but the victims escaped unharmed. On 4 March, an elderly man narrowly escaped the elephant's wrath while working in a arecanut plantation in Kesaguli village.The elephant will be transferred to the Dubare elephant camp. *—Salar News*

Parties dupe us with false vows: Tribals

Nagarhole tribals lack access to water, power

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

People of the Nagarhole's Jenu Kuruba tribe say they got a toilet for the first time, thanks to the elections *REPRESENTATIVE PHOTO*

Crammed into a tiny room and learning for about five to six hours may not be what children look forward to. But it's obvious that the seven-odd children, aged between 3 and 10, are really happy to be sitting inside the spanking new anganwadi at the Nagarhole Gadde Hadi, a settlement consisting of about 60 families of the Jenu Kuruba tribe in the forests of Nagarhole in Karnataka.

The children are aware that it's a privilege that no one before them had enjoyed – the anganwadi is the only pucca construction in that forest settlement. The 12×12 room suddenly popped up in July last year, after years of cajoling, possibly because the election is round the corner, said anganwadi worker JK Bhagya. "We even got a toilet. Before this we were operating from a shed," she added.

These few and far between 'sops for votes' are the reason why the Jenu Kuruba community, which is fighting the government for decades for even the basic amenities – like land rights, access to water and electricity – bother to cast their votes, President of Nagarhole Budakattu Jamma Paley Hakkustapana Samiti said JK Thimma.

According to the official website of Nagarhole Tiger Reserve, the forest is home to 45 tribal settlements or 'hadis' – 1,703 families belonging to Jenu Kurubas, Betta Kurubas, Yeravas and Soliga communities."For years, they tried to evict us from these forests by denying us everything. Over the years, we have learned that even if there are many welfare schemes on paper, it rarely reaches us," Thimma a native said. For the families that opted to be relocated, hoping for a better life, the situation is much worse. "Not so long ago, vehicles could not come inside our settlement because of the trenches made to prevent elephants crossing over to the coffee plantations. We just needed a bridge connecting us to the road. After years and years of begging, we were finally granted during the last Assembly elections," said S Ramakrishna, 43, who works as a farm hand in Nanachi Gadde Hadi.

Now, prior to Lok Sabha elections, under Jal Jeevan Mission, six months ago, each household was given a tap connection. "But there is no water coming in the tap yet. I suppose we will get them by next election," said Ramakrishna. *—PTI*

Madabhavi residents to boycott polls over chemical units

VIJAYAPURA, 18 APRIL

Residents of Madabhavi Tanda 1 in the taluk have decided to boycott upcoming Lok Sabha elections to protest against a chemical manufacturing and tyre shredding plant that has been causing health issues in the area.

With a population exceeding 5,000, Madabhavi Tanda 1 is home to around 3,000 voters. The factory was established six years ago by a Mumbai-based businessman on Anati Road.

The factory has been emitting foul odours and smoke. Residents have reported various health issues such as paralysis, respiratory problems, cardiac arrests, miscarriages among women, and other ailments. Vulnerable groups such as children, women, and the elderly have been particularly impacted.

Despite repeated appeals to shut down the factory by local representatives and the district administration, no action has been taken to address the residents' grievances. Residents have expressed their disappointment with the district administration and industrial department officials for their inaction against the factory. The toxic emissions from the factory have not only affected the health of the residents but also damaged horticultural crops, including grapes. *—Salar News*

BATTLE FOR B'LURU NORTH

Shobha being communal is a plus for me, says Rajeev

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Rajeev Gowda *PHOTO: PTI*

Shobha Karandlaje is known for indulging in communal division and polarisation, which people don't want here, alleges Congress leader MV Rajeev Gowda as he takes on her in Bengaluru North constituency in the Lok Sabha polls.

People want to enjoy a good quality of life, grow and prosper, and don't want this area to become communally charged and divided, says the former Professor of Indian Institute of Management Bangalore where he taught economics and policy.

Bengaluru North has been a BJP stronghold for a long time, but he appeared upbeat about his electoral prospects. There is no Modi wave in State this Lok Sabha elections, the 60-year-old claimed.

It's the five guarantee schemes of the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government delivered within 10 months of coming to power are what is helping people who are in trouble, he said.

Also, the "sense of injustice to Karnataka (in terms devolution of funds by Centre) and the (dismal) record of the previous BJP government here are what will work in favour of the Congress," the national spokesperson of Congress and former Rajya Sabha member said.

This is the first time that Gowda is contesting for Lok Sabha.

He said a plus for him in the polls is that Karandlaje — the Udupi- Chikkamagaluru MP who was shifted to Bengaluru North by BJP — is a "controversial candidate". "She faced 'go back' slogans in Udupi-Chikkamagaluru from her people….here (Bengaluru North) also enough people are not cooperating with her… So basically, people feel like this is not a candidate they want to support," he claimed. *—PTI*

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar *PHOTO: ANI*

'Will supply Cauvery water in City by hook or crook'

- Shivakumar's reaction came after he allegedly told voters that he would provide Cauvery waters to them if they voted for his brother DK Suresh

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday said that he will make sure the supply of Cauvery river water to the residents of Bengaluru by "hook or by crook".

His reaction came after he allegedly told voters that he would provide Cauvery waters to them if they voted for his brother DK Suresh, who is seeking re-election from Bangalore Rural.

"We are there to solve the problems...It is our duty; we are doing it. We are there to sort out their problem, by hook or by crook," he told reporters here. In a video clip surfaced on social media Shivakumar was purportedly heard saying to the residents of an housing society in his brother's constituency that he had come for a "business deal" and if they voted for his brother he will ensure the supply of Cauvery river water to them.

Amit Malviya, BJP IT department head, attacked Shivakumar, and said, it is his responsibility as a minister to provide amenities to the people. "If he doesn't, then BJP will. But such threats and quid pro quo for delivering what one has been voted for is UNACCEPTABLE," he further alleged.

"Congress stands on trust and promises. Equality - Equal share, development of all is our goal. Our guarantees are not only for five years but also for a decade. Women across the State are ready to respond to BJP's baseless criticism. Our guarantees are pledge of progress for every citizen," Shivakumar said in a post on X. *—ANI*

LEADERSHIP CHANGE?

LS poll results will have bearing on CM's post, says Byrathi Suresh

KOLAR, 18 APRIL

Byrathi Suresh *PHOTO: PTI*

Indicating that Lok Sabha poll results will have a bearing on Siddaramaiah's continuation as Chief Minister of Karnataka, Minister Byrathi Suresh on Thursday warned that voting for Opposition candidates poses a threat to the chief minister's position.

The statements gain significance amid persistent rumours about a leadership change in the ruling Congress in the State after the Lok Sabha polls, or midway through the current Assembly's tenure.

Amid such speculations, Siddaramaiah had recently asked the people of his Varuna Assembly segment to give Congress candidate a lead of at least 60,000 votes in Lok Sabha polls, to ensure that he remains in the post of chief minister.

On the same day in Mandya, Deputy Chief Minister and DK Shivakumar, who has made no secret about his chief ministerial ambitions, told the people that the desire with which they supported the party in Assembly poll in May last year, keeping him in Vmind, "will not turn out to be false." *—PTI*

Siddaramaiah is raising terrorists in Bengaluru, says R Ashoka

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

R Ashok, the leader of Opposition in the assembly, has lashed out at Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, accusing them of politicising the recent incident involving Hindu youths being attacked by Muslim youths while chanting "Jai Shri Ram" during Sri Ram Navami celebrations. Ashok claimed that such incidents are a result of the Congress government's crony politics. *—PTI*

Congress will win up to 20 LS seats in State: CM

BENGALURU/ CHIKKABALLAPURA, 18 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday said the response from voters towards Congress is "very good" and the party would win up to 20 seats in the state in the coming Lok Sabha polls.

The guarantee schemes launched by his government will not be stopped for any reason, Siddaramaiah asserted as he claimed that Congress will return to power after completing the current term, and they would continue.

"The response is very good from the voters in Karnataka, but I do not know about the other parts of the country. As far as Karnataka is concerned, we will win up to 20 seats this time," Siddaramaiah said.

In the 2019 parliamentary elections, Congress and its then alliance partner JD(S), which were running a coalition government at the time, had won just one seat each, while BJP secured 25, and had also ensured the victory of an independent supported by it.

This time, JD(S) is in an alliance with BJP, and is contesting in three seats, and the saffron party in the remaining. Congress is contesting in all 28 seats.

Responding to a question about BJP State President BY Vijayendra's comments that the guarantee schemes are "temporary", he said, "Vijayendra doesn't know things, what does he mean by temporary? Is he a fortune teller? In Karnataka we will be (in power) this term and the next term too, and will not stop guarantee schemes for any reason."

"Guarantee schemes will be continued and for this we have set aside Rs 52,000 crore in the budget," he added.

Speaking at an election rally at Chikkaballapur, he also said that people are disillusioned with the ruling-BJP at the Centre and a new Congress government will assume office after the Lok Sabha elections he added.

He assured that the new government will implement various programs and steps to waive off loans of farmers in the country. *—Salar News/ PTI*

Orion Fun League to kickstart today

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Orion Fun League 2024 will be held between 19 April to 5 May, 2024, at the three Orion Malls in Bengaluru—Orion Mall at Brigade Gateway, Orion Avenue Mall in Cooke Town, and Orion Uptown Mall at Whitefield-Hoskote crossing. It is being organised in association with Cartoon Network. This gives Bengalureans will therefore the chance to meet and interact with world-famous Cartoon Network characters such as Teen Titans Go, Grizzy & The Lemmings, Ben 10, Power Puff Girls, Tom & Jerry, and many more. "We are thrilled to present another exciting edition of Orion Fun League. This event guarantees an unforgettable experience for all ages, featuring immersive theme-based decor, thrilling games and entertainment, bouncy castles, carnival food kiosks, and exclusive appearances by favourite Cartoon Network characters. Orion Fun League in 2024 promises to kick off the summer season with an unparalleled extravaganza of entertainment and fun, specially curated for children and families" said Sunil Munshi, Vice President of Retail at Brigade Group. *—Salar News*

CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Cong will break BJP's stronghold: Sowmya

Cong candidate's campaign focusses on 5 guarantees & tax disparities

VAISHNAVI GOPALRAJ
BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

SOWMYA REDDY
INTERVIEW

- Congress candidate for Bengaluru South Sowmya Reddy has opted for the traditional route to canvass voters by going door to door and seeking votes herself.

Congress candidate for Bengaluru South Sowmya Reddy has opted for the traditional route to canvass voters by going door to door and seeking votes herself.

On Thursday, she was welcomed by her supporters with a bike rally in Govindrajnagar ward and her campaign car echoed chants of "Congress Sarkara ee bari" (Congress will win this year) as it moved through the streets. Around 4,000 people gathered in support. Her father and Cabinet Minister R Ramalinga Reddy was behind the scenes planning the poll strategies.

Sowmya, who lost in 2023 Assembly elections, said this time, Congress will hear every door-to-door problem and address the solution if they vote for her. The bike rally across 16 wards of Govindrajnagar highlighted Congress's five guarantees, urging voters to give the party a chance in Bengaluru South, traditionally a stronghold of the BJP, with only one Congress victory in 1991.

Sowmya's campaign focused on raising awareness about Congress's five guarantees and addressing tax disparities faced by Kannadigas.

Salar News managed to catch up with Sowmya during her campaign to get her views on poll strategies and views plaguing the seat.

You have been carrying out the rally for over a month, what are the problems you noticed?

Throughout our month-long rally, we've identified numerous issues plaguing Namma Bengaluru. The City's transformation over the past two decades, particularly post-IT boom, has revealed glaring problems such as inadequate infrastructure and a looming water crisis.

BJP has the stronghold in Bengaluru and Congress has won only once. Do you think you can break the streak?

I firmly believe we can break BJP's stronghold in Bengaluru. People have experienced firsthand the benefits of a Congress government and have also witnessed the unjust treatment from Central government.

One glaring issue that caught your attention during the nomination rally?

It is the plight of slum residents, who are deprived of basic facilities. Despite being neglected by BJP MP, I, as a Bengaluru native, am determined to leverage City's brand and address these issues head-on to uplift their living conditions. *—Salar News*

SOWMYA REDDY

- **Age:** 41
- **Party:** Congress
- **Community:** Vokkaliga
- **Education:** Bachelor of Engineering-Chemical Engineering
- **Assets:** ₹2.30 cr
- **Native:** Bengaluru
- **Criminal Charges:** 6
  - FIR filed for intent to provoke breach of the peace in 2023 in Bengaluru
  - FIR filed for Karnataka Epidemic Diseases Act violations in 2022. FIR filed to provoke breach of the peace in 2021. FIR filed for damaging public property in 2022, FIR filed for violations under Representation of People Act 1951

Candidate Profile:

- **2018:** MLA – Jayanagara
- **2019:** General Secretary – All India Mahila Congress

BJP files complaint with EC against Sowmya Reddy

BENGALURU, 18 APRIL

Gajendra S, BJP's election agent for Bengaluru South *PHOTO: PTI*

- BJP on Thursday lodged a complaint with the Election Commission against Bengaluru South Congress candidate Sowmya Reddy and others for alleged violation of the Model Code of Conduct

BJP on Thursday lodged a complaint with the Election Commission against Bengaluru South Congress candidate Sowmya Reddy and others for alleged violation of the Model Code of Conduct.

The complaint by Gajendra S, BJP's election agent for Bengaluru South, alleges that Congress workers were inducing voters in BTM Layout locality here by asking them to produce their Aadhaar in exchange for a 'Guarantee Card' from the party, according to which the voters would receive bonds of Rs 1 lakh after the elections.

Submitting photographs as evidence to the Election Commission of India, BJP said in its complaint: "This is to bring to your kind notice that Congress leaders, including its candidate Sowmya Reddy, former BBMP mayor Manjunath Reddy and others, are violating the Model Code of Conduct, provisions of IPC and the Representation of People Act, 1951 by inducing voters belonging to the 26 – Bengaluru South Parliamentary Constituency."

The complaint further said: "On April 17, Congress Leader Manjunath Reddy and other leaders, on the instructions of Congress Candidate Sowmya Reddy, were found inducing voters from economically weaker sections of the society in BTM Layout Assembly Constituency by compelling them to provide their Aadhaar Cards and other personal information in return for a Guarantee Card & promised voters that in case they provided the said details, they will be given bonds of Rs 1 lakh after the elections. This has been captured in photographs and videos." *—PTI*

POLL PULSE
LOK SABHA ELECTION 2024
SALAR | FRIDAY | 19 APRIL 2024
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

Ex-MLA sells land for daughter's poll expense

KENDRAPARA, 18 APRIL

Struggling to meet the rising expenses of the upcoming assembly elections, a former Congress MLA in Odisha recently sold off a portion of his ancestral land to fund his daughter who is contesting as a candidate. Debendra Sharma, who represented Aul assembly constituency in Kendrapara district from 2014 to 2019, sold off his five decimal homestead land in his native village recently. Facing formidable challenges Sharma expressed concerns over the lack of monetary support the Congress party, citing the freezing of party accounts by Income Tax department. "My daughter Debasmita Sharma,28, is contesting the polls from the constituency where both my father and I was previously elected as MLAs," he said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: EIKIPEDIA

Cong spokesperson booked for alleged hate speech

KOZHIKODE, 18 APRIL

Kerala police on Thursday registered a case against Congress national Spokesperson Shama Mohamed for allegedly making a hate speech during an election campaign in the Kozhikode Lok Sabha constituency recently. The poll panel received the complaint from a native of Thiruvananthapuram, they said.According to police, Mohamed, while addressing an election meeting at the Kuttikkattoor area, allegedly said if the BJP comes to power again at the Centre, the places of worship of minority communities will be harmed. Mohamed said that she did not intend to hurt religious sentiments and stood by what she said. *—PTI*

Vijayan compares pre-poll surveys to paid news

MALAPPURAM, 18 APRIL

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Thursday strongly criticised the pre-poll surveys conducted by various media organisations, likening them to paid news. The veteran CPI (M) leader was reacting to a question about pre-poll surveys carried out by various media outlets, which indicated a clear lead for Congress-led UDF in the Lok Sabha polls in Kerala. "Just as certain news items are labelled as paid news due to their lack of credibility or biased nature, some surveys have surfaced that share similar characteristics," Vijayan said. Referring to the results of the 2021 Assembly polls, he alleged that people are beginning to question whether current surveys are similar to paid news. *—PTI*

On video, BJP candidate 'shoots arrow' at mosque

HYDERABAD, 18 APRIL

BJP's Hyderabad Lok Sabha constituency candidate Madhavi Latha landed in controversy after a video in which she was seen gesturing shooting an arrow towards a mosque, during a procession surfaced on Thursday. The video which is going viral, appears to have been shot on Wednesday during the Sri Ram Navami procession in the city. In a post on 'X,' Madhavi said it has come to her notice that an incomplete video of her is being circulated in the media to create negativity. AIMIM Chief Asaduddin Owaisi reacting to the video came down heavily on BJ saying there is threat to peace from BJP and RSS. *—PTI*

Cong supporting Naxals for votes: BJP

Cong's Shrinate called slain Naxals 'martyrs'

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

BJP on Thursday alleged Congress is advocating for Naxals for votes as it has sensed its defeat in the Lok Sabha elections.

Addressing a press conference at BJP headquarters, party national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla alleged that Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate on Wednesday described Naxals killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh as "martyrs" and raised questions over the action against the extremists.

Security personnel gunned down 29 Naxals in Kanker, Chhattisgarh on Tuesday, in the biggest encounter ever in the state which has been facing the Naxal menace for the past three decades.

"We have seen a very important operation in Chhattisgarh in which 29 Naxals were eliminated by security personnel. It was indeed a big achievement for the security forces," Poonawalla said.

Shehzad Poonawalla *PHOTO: ANI*

- Security personnel gunned down 29 Naxals in Kanker, Chhattisgarh on Tuesday, in the biggest encounter ever in the state which has been facing the Naxal menace for the past three decades

"Instead of welcoming the action by the security forces, Congress has done what is expected of them. However, it is unthinkable that it claimed that Naxals were essentially martyrs. It put a question mark on the bravery of our security forces," he charged.

"Supriya Shrinate described Naxals as martyrs and expressed sympathy for them. The Congress leader said that a thorough probe should be conducted into this (operation)," Poonawalla said as he played a video clip of Shrinate's comments.

"Congress leaders are advocating for Naxals as they are losing in the elections. They are not hesitant to stand by terrorists while opposing Modi," Poonawalla said.

The number of fatalities in Tuesday's operation was the highest suffered by Naxals in a single encounter in the history of Chhattisgarh's fight against Left Wing Extremism (LWE). *—PTI*

ALL SET FOR POLLS

Clockwise from top left: J&K Peoples Democratic Party Anantnag-Rajouri candidate Mehbooba Mufti, BJP Medak candidate Madhavaneni Raghunandan Rao; NCP Baramati candidate Supriya Sule, Ravindra Dhangekar and Amol Kolhefile, NCP Baramati candidate Sunetra Ajit Pawar in the presence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis in Pune, file their papers on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI/ @RAGHUNANDANRAOM*

Aam Aadmi Chief eating 'Aam': ED

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, arrested in an excise scam case, is eating food high in sugar like mangoes and sweets every day despite having type 2 diabetes to create grounds for medical bail, ED claimed before a court on Thursday.

Enforcement Directorate (ED) made the claim before special judge for CBI and ED cases, Kaveri Baweja, who directed the Tihar jail authorities to file a report in the matter, including Kejriwal's diet chart.

Kejriwal has moved the court seeking permission to consult his regular doctor via video conference because of fluctuating sugar levels.

The judge directed the authorities concerned to file the report by tomorrow, when the court is likely to take up the matter again.

ED has alleged a large part of the Rs 100 crore AAP received as kickbacks from the South Group was used for the Goa state polls.

The judge also extended till 26 April the judicial custody of AAP leader Manish Sisodia in the money laundering case linked to the alleged excise scam.

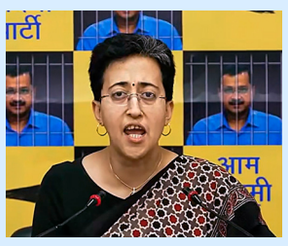
Arvind Kejriwal *PHOTO: PTI*

The judge extended Sisodia's custody after he was produced before the court through a video conference.

CBI as well as ED have alleged that irregularities were committed while modifying the Delhi Excise Policy 2020-21, undue favours were extended to licence holders, licence fee was waived or reduced and licences were extended without the competent authority's approval. *—PTI*

ED lied about Kejriwal's diet; conspiracy to kill him: Atishi

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL



Atishi *PHOTO: PTI*

Delhi Cabinet Minister Atishi on Thursday claimed there was a "huge conspiracy" to kill Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who has been arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in the Delhi excise policy case, by denying him home-cooked food in the jail.Her charge came hours after the ED claimed before a court that Kejriwal is eating high sugar foods like mangoes and sweets every day despite having type 2 diabetes to create grounds for medical bail. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) made the claim before special judge for CBI and ED cases, Kaveri Baweja, who directed the Tihar jail authorities to file a report in the matter, including Kejriwal's diet chart. Addressing a press conference, Atishi accused ED of lying about the Chief Minister's diet. Atishi also cliamed ED told court that Kejriwal is eating bananas. *—PTI*

Ram Navami clash: BJP, Didi blame each other

RAIGANJ, 18 APRIL

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday alleged that BJP instigated violence during Ram Navami celebrations in the state.

She claimed that the violence in Murshidabad district was "pre-planned" and accused the saffron party of orchestrating it ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

A blast happened near a procession inMurshidabad's Shaktipur area on Wednesday, injuring a woman, police said. "Everything was pre-planned. DIG of Murshidabad was removed a day ahead of Ram Navami so that you (BJP) can carry out violence," she said at an election rally in the Raiganj Lok Sabha constituency.

Didi responsible for Murshidabad violence: BJP

Meanwhile, BJP said that Banerjee should be held to account for failing to protect Bengali Hindus, holding her responsible for the violence during Ram Navami celebrations in Murshidabad district.

"Bengal is falling apart and Mamata Banerjee is responsible for it. Her vituperative and communal speeches are the reason Ram Bhakts have been attacked across Bengal," BJP co-in-charge for West Bengal Amit Malviya said in a post on X. According to West Bengal Police, a woman was injured in a blast that took place when a procession was taken out in Murshidabad's Shaktipur area on Wednesday *—PTI*

TMC LODGES PLAINT WITH EC AGAINST WB GUV

KOLKATA, 18 APRIL

Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Thursday filed a complaint with Election Commission against West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose for allegedly interfering in the ensuing Lok Sabha polls in the state.

"A complaint against Governor CV Ananda Bose has been lodged with EC for repeatedly interfering with the ensuing Lok Sabha Elections, 2024 and attempting to visit poll-going areas during the silent period and on polling day," a TMC leader said.

Election Commission has advised West Bengal Governor to call off his proposed tour of Cooch Behar on the eve of the Lok Sabha polls' first phase as it was violative of the Model Code of Conduct, sources said on Wednesday. Acting on the advice of EC, Bose called off his proposed tour to Cooch Behar, during which he intended to "oversee" the polling process.

He, however, alleged that an attempt was being made to "politicise the Governor's office", while asserting he would not allow anyone to use him as a "pawn on the political chess board".

Polling is scheduled in Cooch Behar on 19 April. *—ANI*

BJP disrupting harmony: Rahul

KANNUR, 18 APRIL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday the BJP saying it was creating disharmony in the nation and, in turn, harming millions of people in the country.

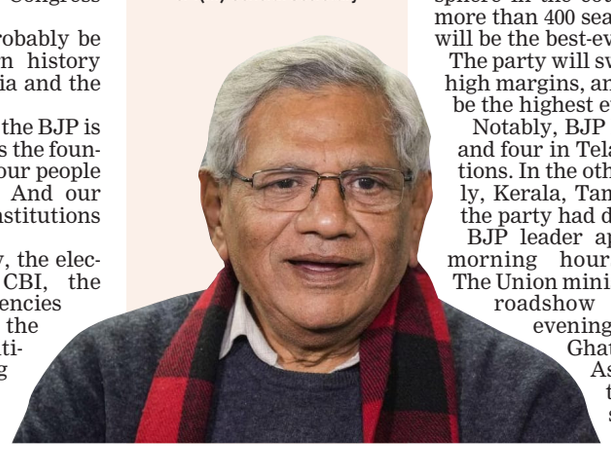
Addressing a massive election rally in Kannur, Gandhi said BJP was attempting to change the diversity of the country, whereas the Congress accepts the differences.

He said the upcoming election will probably be the first one in the country's modern history "which is about the Constitution of India and the democratic structure of our nation".

"No political party has attempted what the BJP is trying in India today. The Constitution is the foundation of modern India. It is what gives our people equal rights and equal opportunities. And our Constitution is protected by various institutions in our country," Gandhi said.

He said the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the election commission, the police, the CBI, the Enforcement Directorate, and other agencies are supposed to be protectors of the Constitution and the rights of Indian citizens. He alleged that the BJP was trying to change the diversity of the country and "wasting" their time. *—PTI*

> Prime Minister Narendra Modi is making statements during his Lok Sabha poll campaign in various parts of the country which violate the Model Code of Conduct. It is strange that Congress and UDF are accusing LDF, particularly CPI(M), of being silent on attacking Modi
>
> -Sitaram Yechury, CPI(M) General Secretary



BJP will perform well in South: HM

AHMEDABAD, 18 APRIL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday during a campaign roadshow expressed confidence that BJP will give its best performance so far in south India in Lok Sabha elections this time.

"Be it East, West, North or South, the atmosphere in the country suggests that we will get more than 400 seats. BJP's performance in South will be the best-ever this time," he said.

The party will sweep all 26 seats in Gujarat with high margins, and its tally in Uttar Pradesh will be the highest ever, Shah claimed.

Notably, BJP had won 25 seats in Karnataka and four in Telangana in the 2019 general elections. In the other three southern states, namely, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, the party had drawn a blank.

BJP leader appealed people to vote in the morning hours to avoid summer heat. The Union minister was taking part in his third roadshow of the day on Thursday evening. It wound through Sabarmati, Ghatlodia, Naranpura and Vejalpur Assembly segments, all part of the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha seat. *—PTI*

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during a public meeting in support of party candidates in South Dinajpur district on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

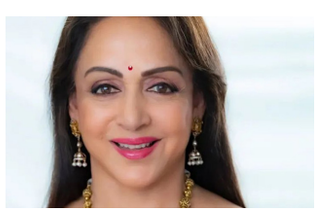
I am 'gopi' of Lord Krishna: Hema Malini

MATHURA, 18 APRIL

Actress-turned-politician Hema Malini, contesting the Lok Sabha election from Mathura as a BJP candidate for the third time, said Wednesday that she considers herself as a "gopi" of Lord Krishna.

Calling herself "Gopi of Krishna", Hema Malini said since Lord Krishna loves the "Brijwasis", she thought that he will shower his blessings on her only if she serves them sincerely.

She expressed her gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah for giving her the opportunity to serve the Brijwasis for the third time from Mathura.



Hema Malini *PHOTO: PTI*

She said the development of 'Braj 84 Kos Parikrama', lying in a miserable condition, will be her first priority. Hema Malini claimed to have raised a question in Parliament about the pollution of the Ganga and the Yamuna rivers even before the Namami Gange project was launched. *—PTI*

FORCED TO PROVE IDENTITY

Third-gender voters fear discrimination

KOLKATA, 18 APRIL

Several enrolled third-gender voters in West Bengal have expressed reluctance to queue up at polling booths, claiming that they are viewed with disdain and repeatedly asked by security personnel to prove their identity.

Despite having valid documents including residential proof, many transgender don't have their names updated in the voter list, said Ranjita Sinha, a former member of the state's transgender board and a prominent activist.

Sinha also claimed that the recorded figure of transgender community members by the Election Commission in the state is significantly lower than the actual number. While the estimated number is between 40,000 and 50,000, the poll panel's count of transgender is 1,837. She advocated greater empathy and sensitivity towards the community at polling booths, similar to the provisions for men, women, senior citizens and the differently abled people.

While the estimated number of trans people is between 40,000 and 50,000, the poll panel's count is just 1,837 voters *PHOTO: PTI*

She also stressed on the importance of distinguishing between transgenders and the broader LGBTQ+ community to address misconceptions.

An EC official said efforts have been taken to encourage transgender community members to vote through creative campaigns that target the minorities and underprivileged groups. He emphasised on the constitutional and judicial guarantee of fundamental rights for transgenders, asserting that EC officials must ensure that they are able to vote freely. *—PTI*

PHOTO: YT/ PRAGNYA ACADEMY

Son of civic worker cracks UPSC exam

THANE, 18 APRIL

For 32-year-old Prashant Suresh Bhojane, whose mother works as a civic sweeper in Maharashtra's Thane city, cracking the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) exam was always his dream, and he persevered against all odds to finally fulfil the goal. In the UPSC Civil Services Examination (CSE) 2023 final results declared on Tuesday, he passed the exam by securing the 849th rank. Prashant had started the journey towards fulfilling his dream in 2015, when he first appeared for the exam, and finally cracked it in the ninth attempt. His achievement gave a reason to cheer for the residents of Khartan Road Sweepers Colony, where his family lives, as they took out a procession in celebration on Wednesday night. A few local politicians also took part in it. *—PTI*

Bengal pre-pones school vacation amid heatwave

KOLKATA, 18 APRIL

West Bengal government on Thursday preponed the summer vacation of state-run and aided schools from 22 April in view of the prevailing heatwave conditions. A notification issued by School Education Department on Thursday said apart from pupils, the teaching and non-teaching staff of the schools will be on leave during the period but subject to the direction of election authorities concerned in view of ensuing Lok Sabha elections. Earlier in view of the ensuing elections and keeping in mind many schools in northern parts of Bengal have already been turned into camps of security forces as also booths, the summer vacation had been scheduled from 6 May. *—PTI*

Rajasthan man hangs self in police custody

JAIPUR, 18 APRIL

A man who was arrested on murder charges allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself from the window of a prison in Dausa's Lalsot police station, police said on Thursday. Dausa Superintendent Ranjeeta Sharma said Manoj Meena, 32, was arrested on Wednesday for allegedly murdering his relative and was in custody. On the night of his arrest, Meena hanged himself from the window of the jail with a blanket, the SP said. He was immediately rushed to the district hospital where he was declared dead, she said. The postmortem of the body has been conducted and will be handed over to family members. *—PTI*

India-US jet engine deal revolutionary: Defence head Austin

WASHINGTON, 18 APRIL

India-US deal to jointly produce fighter jet engines for Indian Air Force is revolutionary, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin has told lawmakers, as he hailed the "great relationship" with India. The landmark deal was announced last June during the historic Official State Visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the US. General Electric signed a memorandum of understanding with Hindustan Aeronautics to co-produce F-414 fighter jet engines in India. According to provisions of the deal, GE Aerospace's F414 engines will be co-produced in India to power Tejas light combat aircraft Mk2. Austin said United States has a "great relationship" with India. "We recently have enabled India to produce a jet weapon, a jet engine in India. And that's kind of revolutionary." *—PTI*

Nestle in soup over excess sugar in Cerelac, baby food

Report claims Nestle adds 3g sugar in every serving of Cerelac

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Startling findings have emerged regarding the sugar content in Cerelac, a milk cereal-based complementary food for babies produced by the multinational food company Nestlé.

Despite the World Health Organisation's (WHO) stringent guidelines banning added sugars in baby food products, Cerelac has been found to contain an average of nearly 3g of sugar per serving in India.

Public Eye, along with the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), based in Switzerland, approached a laboratory in Belgium for testing cereal products. Laboratories in Switzerland, where Nestle is headquartered, declined their request.

Out of the 15 Indian Cerelac products tested, laboratory analyses revealed that each serving of cereal contained more than 2.7g of added sugar. While Nestle's labelling highlights the nutrients, added sugar is not as transparently displayed.

The researchers exposed an unusual double standard, where the company was not following the WHO guidelines in poor countries, but was seemingly favouring higher-income countries.

There were 70 million adults living with obesity in India in 2022, with almost twice the number of women than men, at 44 million and 26 million, respectively, a recent WHO study found. Over 11 per cent of Indians are diabetic and 35.5 per cent suffer from hypertension.

Ceralac reported sales crossing $1 billion in 2022 **PHOTO: MYNESTLE.IN**

- While the prevalence of generalised obesity is 28.6 per cent, abdominal obesity is at 39•5 per cent.

While the prevalence of generalised obesity is 28.6 per cent, abdominal obesity is at 39•5 per cent, the findings of a study published on 8 June, 2023 in journal The Lancet revealed.

Further, WHO warns that obesity has reached "epidemic proportions" in low- and middle-income countries and is accelerating the rise of cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes. Increasing consumption of ultra-processed foods high in sugar, is said to be one of the main causes behind rising obesity.

Ceralac reported sales crossing $1 billion in 2022 worldwide, according to Euromonitor, a market analysis firm. In India alone, sales exceeded $250 million in the same year.

Ironically, Nestle promotes Cerelac as a vital source of 12 essential nutrients in the country.

Children get used to the sweet taste and start looking for more sugary foods, starting a negative cycle that increases the risk of nutrition-based disorders in adult life. These include obesity and other chronic non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes or high blood pressure.

The researchers also identified hypocritical advertising, misleading consumers that the multinational is health conscious.

Aggressive marketing techniques deployed by the company also rein consumers in with false information. Baby and Me, Nestle's educational platform, available in over 60 countries, promotes healthy eating for babies, eventually leading parents towards Nestle products.

The reason that countries can surpass WHO guidelines is because national legislations are often based on Codex Alimentarius, a set of international standards governed by an intergovernmental commission in Rome.

According to the standards, added sugar in baby foods is allowed up to a specific limit, depending on the product. For infant cereals, up to 20 per cent is permitted.

Nestle has previously faced criticism for funding health research in poor countries such as South Africa, with experts noting that financial ties between corporations and academic institutions are well known to lead to conflicts of interest. *—Downtoearth*

27 DAYS AT SEA

A 12-member tri-services all-women crew completed a 27-day sailing expedition in Arabian Sea on Thursday, as a precursor to preparing for global circumnavigation competition scheduled in September **PHOTO: PIB**

'DELIBERATELY SHOT'

Tribal man shot dead in 'police firing' in Jharkhand

GODDA, 18 APRIL

A 30-year-old man from the particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG) was killed allegedly in police firing during an operation to nab an accused in an extortion case in Jharkhand's Godda, an officer said on Thursday.

The family members of the tribal man alleged that he was killed by a police bullet and demanded strict action against the personnel who fired at him.

Godda Superintendent of Police (SP) Nathu Singh Meena said that a special team has been formed under sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) to investigate the incident.

The SP said that the deceased was Hari Narayan Pahariya, a resident of Bada Danga Para, around 350km from Jharkhand's capital Ranchi.

According to a police statement, a police team went to Bada Danga Para on Wednesday to raid house of one Benadik Hembram after an FIR related to extortion was lodged at Sundar Pahari police on 16 April.

"During the raid, police saw a person running away from the house. Assistant sub-inspector Rajnath Yadav ordered him to stop but he tried to flee. During the process of catching him, a firing incident took place and the person (Hari Narayan) received bullet injury in his left shoulder," the statement said.

The injured was brought to community health centre, Sundar Pahari, where doctors declared him dead during treatment, it stated.

Meanwhile, the elder brother of Hari Narayan, Kamdev Pahariya denied the police's allegation that he was running away from the house.

"The incident happened at a riverside where my brother was attending nature's call. My brother was deliberately shot," Kamdev told PTI. "My brother was a farmer... He has two daughters and a son. He was the sole bread earner in the family. Now, who will take care of his wife and children?" he asked. *—PTI*

PONZI SCHEME CASE

ED attaches Shilpa, Raj's ₹97.79 cr assets

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday said it has attached a bungalow and a flat, apart from equity shares, worth about Rs 98 crore of actor Shipa Shetty and her husband Raj Kundra in connection with of a money-laundering case linked to the alleged crypto assets Ponzi scheme.

The federal agency has issued a provisional order under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to attach the properties of the couple.

The money-laundering case stems from FIRs lodged by the Maharashtra Police and Delhi Police against a company named Variable Tech Private Limited, late Amit Bhardwaj, Ajay Bhardwaj, Vivek Bhardwaj, Simpy Bhardwaj, Mahender Bhardwaj and a number of multi-level marketing agents who are alleged to have collected huge amounts of funds in the form of Bitcoins (worth Rs 6,600 crore in 2017) from the public with the "false promise" of 10 per cent monthly return in the form of Bitcoins.

The lawyer for Shilpa Shetty and Raj Kundra said they shall follow the due process of law and take necessary steps **PHOTO: PTI**

It was alleged by ED that the Bitcoins were supposed to be utilised for mining and investors were supposed to get huge returns in crypto assets, but the promoters "cheated" them and have been concealing the "ill-gotten" Bitcoins in obscure online wallets.

Kundra, the agency alleged, received 285 Bitcoins from the "mastermind" and promoter of Gain Bitcoin Ponzi "scam", Amit Bhardwaj, for "setting up a Bitcoin mining farm in Ukraine". These Bitcoins were sourced out of the "proceeds of crime" collected by Amit Bhardwaj from gullible investors, it said. The lawyer for Shetty and Kundra said they shall follow the due process of law and take necessary steps, as prescribed under the PMLA, to protect the liberty and property of his clients. ED arrested Simpy Bhardwaj, Nitin Gaur and Nikhil Mahajan in the case last year. They are currently lodged in jail under judicial custody. *—PTI*

The number of deaths of security personnel due to Left Wing Extremism has reportedly declined by 72 per cent **PHOTO: PTI**

80 Naxals killed, 125 arrested in Ch'garh in 2024

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

At least 80 Naxals have been killed and more than 125 arrested while 150 have surrendered in this year so far in Chhattisgarh, where 29 ultras were gunned down two days ago in a fierce encounter with security forces.

Left Wing Extremism-related violence has declined in the country by 52 per cent and the number of deaths by 69 per cent from 6,035 to 1,868 in 2014-23 compared to 2004-14, according to Union home ministry data.

This was the highest number of fatalities suffered by Maoists in a single encounter in the history of the state's fight against Left Wing Extremism (LWE).

Three security personnel suffered injuries in the fierce gun-battle that also led to a large quantity of weapons being seized.

The number of deaths of security personnel due to Left Wing Extremism has declined by 72 per cent from 1,750 in 2004-14 to 485 during 2014-23, while the number of civilian deaths has declined by 68 per cent from 4,285 to 1,383.

The number of districts with incidents of violence was 96 in 2010. This declined by 53 per cent to 45 in 2022. Along with this, the number of police stations reporting violence decreased from 465 in 2010 to 176 in 2022.

In the last five years, more than 5,000 post offices were set up in 90 districts that have Maoist presence or where the ultras were present.

As many as 1,298 banks branches were opened and 1,348 ATMs made operational in the 30 most-affected districts, officials said.

A total of 4,885 mobile towers were constructed at a cost of Rs 2,690 crore in Naxal-hit areas and 9,356 km roads constructed at a cost of Rs 10,718 crore.

The officials said 121 Eklavya residential schools, 43 ITIs and 38 skill development centres were setup to engage the local youth. *—PTI*

BIRD FLU OUTBREAK REPORTED IN ALAPPUZHA

ALAPPUZHA, 18 APRIL

A bird flu outbreak has been reported in two places in this district, officials said here on Thursday. The bird flu was confirmed in ducks reared in an area of ward 1 of Edathva Grama Panchayat and another area in ward 3 of Cheruthana Grama Panchayat, they said. The disease was confirmed after the samples of the ducks showing symptoms of bird flu were sent to a lab in Bhopal for testing.

A district administration official confirmed that samples tested positive for avian influenza (H5N1).

In this situation, according to the action plan of the Government of India, a meeting chaired by the District Collector decided to initiate the process of killing and destroying (culling) domestic birds within a radius of one kilometer from the epicenter. A Rapid Action Force will be formed and related preparations will be completed by the Animal Welfare Department as soon as possible, the official said. The district administration said there is no need to panic unnecessarily as there is no possibility of the disease transmitting to humans. *—PTI*

4 Nigerians arrested with MDMA worth Rs 100 cr

NOIDA, 18 APRIL

Four Nigerian nationals living in Greater Noida were arrested after approximately 25 kg of methylenedioxyphenethylamine (MDMA) drugs were recovered from their rented residence, officials said on Thursday.

The seized MDMA, popularly known as Ecstasy or Molly, would have sold for more than Rs 100 crore in the black market, a senior official said.

"Four Nigerian nationals were taken into custody on Wednesday night after they were found manufacturing MDMA with the help of sophisticated apparatus in a set-up made at their rented accommodation in Greater Noida," he added.

This is the third such case in Greater Noida since 2023 when foreigners have been found manufacturing synthetic drugs in their rented houses. *—PTI*

This is the third such case in Greater Noida since 2023 when foreigners have been found manufacturing drugs in their houses **PHOTO: FREEPIK**

Not in Delhi when wrestler harassed: Brij

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

A Delhi court is likely to pronounce on 26 April its order on whether to frame charges against former Wrestling Federation of India chief and BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh in a sexual harassment case lodged by six female wrestlers against him.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM) Priyanka Rajpoot, who was scheduled to pass order on Thursday, deferred the matter after Singh moved an application before the court seeking further probe in the matter.

In his application, Singh sought time for making further submissions on charges and for further investigation, saying he was not in India on the date of one of the incidents, where a complainant has alleged that she was harassed at the WFI office.

Singh's counsel claimed that the Delhi Police had relied upon the call detail records (CDR) of the coach who had accompanied the complainant and stated that they had gone to WFI on 7 September, 2022, where she was allegedly molested. *—PTI*

FIR booked in Aamir's deepfake 'campaign' video

MUMBAI, 18 APRIL

Mumbai Police have registered an FIR against an unidentified person in connection with a deepfake video of Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan in which he is purportedly seen promoting a political party.

FIR was filed on Wednesday at the Khar police station following a complaint by Khan's office under relevant Indian Penal Code sections, including 419 (impersonation), 420 (cheating) and provisions of the Information Technology Act, the official said.

In the purported 27-second clip, which seems to have been edited using artificial intelligence (AI) technology, Khan can be seen talking about staying away from rhetoric (jumla). The deepfake video shows the actor purportedly in a scene from a decade-old episode of his television show, 'Satyamev Jayate'. "We want to clarify that Aamir has never endorsed any political party throughout his 35-year career. He has dedicated his efforts to raising awareness through Election Commission public awareness campaigns for many past elections. We are alarmed by the recent viral video alleging that Aamir is promoting a particular political party. He would like to clarify that this is a fake video," ," the spokesperson said. *—PTI*

Aamir Khan **PHOTO: PTI**

WORLD HERITAGE DAY

Foreign tourists celebrate World Heritage Day at the Agra Fort, on Thursday. The theme for this year is 'Discover and Experience Diversity'. It is celebrated around the world at famous monuments. It is also known as International day for Monuments and Sites
PHOTO: PTI

A broken hydropower plant takes centrestage in Sikkim

AMID 2024 LOK SABHA POLLS

When a glacial lake burst through a major dam in Sikkim last October, it destroyed the region's largest hydro-electric project, the Teesta III.

It also unleashed a torrent of political criticism around the 1200-megawatt (MW) power plant that its proponents had insisted would transform Sikkim's economy, but for many has instead become emblematic of opacity and alleged corruption around the state's infrastructure development.

Sikkim, with a population of less than 700,000 people — prepares to vote in national elections on 19 April, the now-defunct Teesta III is at the heart of Sikkim's political campaigns. The state also holds elections for its legislative assembly on Friday.

The flood last October left Sikkim with crippling losses, killed at least 40 people and destroyed property and infrastructure. The state government of the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) party has since quietly agreed to sell its majority stake in Teesta III to its minority partner, the Andhra Pradesh-based Greenko Group – pending approval by India's competition regulator.

Greenko has set aside $1.5bn, including taking on an existing $1bn loan, to pay for the purchase. It plans to buy the Teesta III project at par even though a chunk of the power plant has been washed away by floodwaters.

Ganesh Rai, chief minister-aspirant from the newly formed Citizen Action Party (CAP), added that his party had demanded a white paper from the present SKM government on the entire dam burst and eventual sale of Teesta III.

The flood destroyed largest Hydro-electric project and killed at least 40 people
PHOTO: X/ @SUMITDEFENCE

The genesis

The biggest hydropower project, and arguably the costliest, in Sikkim, is the Teesta III. It was developed by a consortium led by the Athena Group through a special purpose vehicle – a separate legal entity created by an organisation – called Teesta Urja Limited (TUL).

as a model that could be used for other projects. It was the cornerstone in then-Chief Minister Pawan Chamling's hydro dream for Sikkim.

The initial cost was pegged at 57 billion rupees ($683.43m) but time and cost overruns more than doubled that to 139.65 billion rupees ($1.69bn). It was finally completed five years late in 2017.

Four proposals were received for the development of Teesta III from Cosmos Electric Power Supply Limited, NHPC, Reliance and Sutlej Jal Nigam Vidyut Limited.

A government-established high-powered committee (HPC) had recommended the proposal of the consortium led by Cosmos twice in 2004 to the Sikkim cabinet.

That same October, Sikkim brought in a new hydropower policy. A new call for proposals in line with the policy received five proposals from the NHPC, National Thermal Power Corporation, SJVNL, Cosmos and a consortium led by Athena Projects Pvt Ltd, India.

The MoU and its violations

As per the MoU, Athena India could not dilute its stake in the project to a third party without the approval of the state government.

In 2008, TUL took a 45 billion consortium of Indian banks. Within a couple of years, Athena reportedly sold close to a 51-percent stake to Asian Genco, making it the majority shareholder. The Singapore-based firm owned by Andhra Pradesh entrepreneur TV Vijaykumar has been linked to Jagan Mohan Reddy, the current chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, who is also the son of its former Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy.

Enter foreign private equity

In 2010, big-ticket international private equity investors – including Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs Investment Management, Everstone Capital, General Atlantic and Norwest Venture Partners – put $425m for a 44 percent stake in Asian Genco, arguably the biggest such deal at the time.

Mauritius-based Varuna Investments Private Limited holds 100 percent preference shares of Singapore-based Asian Genco. (It is not clear who are the beneficiaries of Varuna Investments.)

The terribly flawed hydro economics

As per his 2004 plans, former Chief Minister Chamling expected the state to earn 9 billion rupees ($107.9m) every year from 2015 as his state's share of the revenue from the 21 hydroelectric projects, which would have a combined installed capacity of 4,114 MW and were slated for completion by 2012.

The state had a stake in six projects – between 11 and 26 percent, mostly bought with loans – and was eligible for 12 percent free electricity from all 21 hydropower plants.

But out of the 21 projects, just seven have been completed, with a total of 2,169 MW capacity. Sikkim's share of power from the projects came in at 144.13 MW, well below the 786.15 MW it needed to meet its original revenue goals.

On 3 October last year, the glacial Lhonak Lake in north Sikkim breached its banks, causing a devastating flood, which wrecked the Teesta III project, located 60km (37 miles) downstream. The power output of the state was reduced to a meagre 266 MW from its 2072 MW capacity. (The flood damaged two other power plants, several roads, bridges and villages, killed at least 40 people.

Renewed push

Government has not offered any incentives or grant-in-aid to help revive the Teesta III project after the dam break, although a high-level team visited the dam site and took stock of the damages.

Instead of trying to renew two separate and also contentious projects in the state – Teesta Stage IV 520 MW and the Panan 300 MW project. Part of this push is to see through stranded projects and ensure sufficient electricity supply from Sikkim. The state-run NHPC is developing the Teesta IV, which, according to government data, is scheduled to be completed in 2031-32.

Government data also shows that not only Panan but several other private hydropower projects in Sikkim are stalled, without ascribing reasons, leading to revenue shortfalls for the state. *—Al Jazeera*

SALAR

How are nations addressing concerns regarding plastic?

The terms "chemicals of concern" and "polymers of concern" refer to specific chemical substances and types of polymers recognised for posing significant risks to human health and the environment throughout their life cycles. Abundant scientific evidence highlights the adverse impacts of various plastic chemicals such as monomers and additives. They increase the burden of disease and have substantial health costs, particularly related to endocrine disruption. Marginalised communities, children and women are the most vulnerable.

Chemicals of concern encompass additives like plasticisers (ex. phthalates), flame retardants (ex. brominated compounds), colorants and stabilisers used in plastic manufacturing. They are known for their toxicity, persistence and potential to bioaccumulate, posing risks during production, use and disposal by leaching into the environment. Negotiations prioritise identifying and regulating these chemicals, promoting safer alternatives, and implementing measures to reduce exposure.

In the case of polymers of concern, certain plastics like expanded polystyrene (EPS) foam and specific types of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) present environmental and health risks due to low recyclability, persistence and potential release of hazardous substances during degradation. Discussions aim to address these challenges through targeted regulatory actions, innovation, and policy measures to mitigate the impacts of plastic production and disposal.

Plastics have low recyclability and is hazardous ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

- They are known for their toxicity, persistence and potential to bioaccumulate, posing risks during production, use and disposal by leaching into the environment

It involves creating a negative list of hazardous chemicals prohibited for use and a positive list of permissible chemicals subject to stringent testing requirements. By focusing on chemicals and polymers of concern, negotiations for a future instrument to end plastic pollution aim to safeguard ecosystems and public health from the detrimental effects associated with hazardous plastic materials. The goal is also to foster sustainability and innovation in plastic management practices.

In the context of the ongoing negotiations within the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) to end plastic pollution, the term "primary plastic polymers" refers to the types of plastic resins or polymers that are commonly used in the production of plastic products. These primary polymers represent the foundational building blocks of most plastic items found in everyday use. The negotiations surrounding primary plastic polymers are critical because they focus on addressing the root causes of plastic pollution by targeting specific types of plastics that contribute significantly to environmental degradation and marine litter. Policymakers and stakeholders aim to implement targeted measures to regulate plastic production and consumption.

—Downtoearth

Chemicals and polymers of concern poses significant risk to human health and environment throughout their life cycle
PHOTO: PIXABAY

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Cyclic droughts fuel underage marriages in Maharastra

The study revealed how drought years have increased child marriages and pushed farm labourers to become sugarcane cutters due to distress as a climate adaptation strategy
PHOTO: PIXABAY

Sugarcane industry and cyclic droughts are aggravating early-age marriages in Marathwada, a research revealed.

The region in Maharashtra is historically prone to drought due to recurring dry spells, loss of livelihoods, which often results in mass migration of locals as sugarcane cutters in the various parts of the state.

A research paper Gate-Cane: (Un)tying the knots between climate, cane, and early marriage in rural India published in March revealed how drought years have increased child marriages and pushed farm labourers to become sugarcane cutters due to distress as a climate adaptation strategy.

'Gate-cane wedding' is a term used across villages which have high number of villagers migrating as sugarcane cutters. The practice evolved after the drought of 1972, termed as the worst for the region. The gate-cane weddings are shortcut weddings that are fixed and solemnised within hours or a couple of days followed by peak drought months.

These weddings have no printed invitation or wedding tent or any wedding procession or band. They have minimal guests and the food is usually cooked at home.

These quick-fix weddings occur before or during the post-harvest season. The wedding pattern evolved on the hiring practices followed in the labour-intensive sugarcane industry. Earlier dominated by males, the drought conditions in 1972 pushed women to enter the domain, the study found.

The contractor who recruits the labourers usually prefers a married couple known as koyta or a sickle. They earn Rs 250-320 for very tonne of sugarcane cut. With the wedding, the adolescent girl becomes a wife, helping in domestic chores without getting paid and a labourer or worker supporting her husband.

The contractor usually lures the couple or pushes the community into the practice by offering advance up to Rs 1 lakh for a harvest season that lasts about six months.

While the surplus amount helps the family to repay loans or use it for personal or other expenses, it binds them into debt or bondages until the money is recovered. If the debt remains unpaid due to lack of harvest or poor yield, the family is then forced to enter the vicious cycle by bringing other family members into the gate-cane.

According to the National Family Health Survey (2019-21), about 43 per cent of the women across the region recorded underage marriages.

"It is crucial to note that Marathwada's rate of underage marriage is almost two-fold of the state with 22 per cent.

In severely drought affected regions and districts with high migration, underage marriages are reported to be 51.3 per cent in Beed, 49.9 per cent in Jalna, 44.5 per cent in Parbhani during the NFHS-4 (2015-16)," said Reetika Revathy Subramanian, a PhD student at the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK.

Subramanian said that during the 2010s, when the region witnessed a series of droughts, early marriages increased by 20 per cent. This was directly linked with extreme water scarcity and need to migrate for survival.

The region saw drought in 2012, 2014, 2015 and 2018. From 2019 to 2022, the region also experienced untimely rains and hailstorms during harvest or crucial growth times of crops, leading to heavy losses for farmers.

Establishing the link between the drought years and progress of sugarcane industry in the drought region, the research observed, "Sugarcane production has grown seven-fold in the last five decades, going from an average of 11 million tonnes in the 1960s to 75 million tonnes in the 2010s."

Various socio-economic dynamics are at play for such weddings, research showed. These include caste, number of daughters, dowry, debt, access to groundwater, land ownership and relationship between wife-takers and givers.

To reduce expenses of marriages, get away with dowry, delay dowry and repay loans, the marriage became a means of adaptation.

Subramanian said that research shows that it is a practice observed in other parts of India and world such as Pakistan and Africa, where marrying off a minor daughter during climate change and disaster means one less mouth to feed.

Tatvashil Kamble, a local child rights activist from Beed, said drought conditions have increased stress among families and made girls vulnerable to underage marriages. Speaking to DTE, he said that on April 15, he and some volunteers foiled two underage marriages.

Kamble said that local school principal, teachers and villagers have been informed to keep a close vigil on the familes.

—Downtoearth

PHOTO: X/@MEGTZ1

Police bust cyber gang accused of worldwide fraud

LONDON, 18 APRIL

Police have taken down a gang accused of using a technology service that helped criminals use fraudulent text messages to steal from victims. They have arrested 37 people worldwide and are contacting victims. Officers say younger people who grew up with the internet were the most likely to fall for the "phishing" scam. The technology allowed scammers without technical skills to bombard victims with messages designed to trick them into making payments online. Police targeted the gang's site, LabHost, which helped criminals send the messages and direct victims to fake websites appearing to be legitimate online payment or shopping services. It had enabled the criminals to steal identity information, including 4,80,000 card numbers and 64,000 Pin codes, known in criminal slang as "fullz data", the police said. *—BBC NEWS*

Indian national pleads guilty to $17M fraud in US

WASHINGTON, 18 APRIL

A 52-year-old Indian national has pleaded guilty to participating in a scheme to defraud a US bank in connection with a USD 17 million secured line of credit, US Attorney Philip R Sellinger has announced. Nitin Vats, a former employee of a now-defunct New Jersey-based marble and granite wholesaler, pleaded guilty before US District Judge Susan D Wigenton to one count of an indictment charging him with conspiracy to commit wire fraud affecting a financial institution, the Department of Justice (DoJ) said on Wednesday. According to documents, from March 2016 through March 2018, an owner and employees of Lotus Exim International Inc, including Vats, conspired to obtain from the victim bank a USD 17 million line of credit by fraudulent means. *—PTI*

German leader in court charged with using Nazi slogan

BERLIN, 18 APRIL

One of the most prominent figures in the far-right Alternative für Deutschland party has arrived in court for his trial on charges of using a Nazi slogan, months before a regional election in which he is running to become his state's governor. Björn Höcke, 52, is the leader of the regional branch of the AfD in the eastern state of Thuringia and a powerful figure on the party's hard right. While never formally a national leader of AfD, the former history teacher has been influential as the 11-year-old party has steadily headed further right and ousted several comparatively moderate leaders. At the trial at the state court in Halle, Höcke is charged with using symbols of unconstitutional organisations. *—AP*

Scorsese may direct Frank Sinatra biopic starring DiCaprio

WASHINGTON, 18 APRIL

Fresh off of scoring 10 Oscar nominations for Killers Of The Flower Moon, Martin Scorsese is showing no signs of slowing down. He's got two long-gestating projects he'd like to clear from his To Do list, one of them a biodrama about legendary crooner Frank Sinatra's tumultuous private life. The film, assuming it all comes together, would star the director's current primary collaborator Leonardo DiCaprio as Sinatra, with Jennifer Lawrence the top choice to play his second wife, Ava Gardner. You might think Scorsese can simply hit a button at this point to indicate that he wants to make a movie and everything simply falls into place, but it's far from that easy. *—Courtesy, Empire*

Hezbollah launches missiles at N Israel

Officials said at least 14 Israeli soldiers are wounded in an attack launched from Lebanon

GAZA, 18 APRIL

The Israeli military said 14 of its soldiers were wounded in Wednesday's attack *PHOTO: X/@CORPHEART1*

The Lebanese armed group Hezbollah has claimed responsibility for an attack on a military facility in northern Israel that wounded at least 14 soldiers, saying it was carried out in retaliation for Israeli strikes that killed Hezbollah members.

The Iran-aligned group said it launched "a combined attack with guided missiles and explosive drones on a new military reconnaissance command centre in Arab al-Aramshe," an Arab-majority village of northern Israel near the Lebanese border.

The Israeli military said 14 of its soldiers were wounded in Wednesday's attack and six were in serious condition. It added that it had "struck the sources of fire". Later, the Israeli military said its fighter jets had struck "terrorist infrastructure" of Hezbollah in eastern Lebanon.

The attack comes a day after Israeli strikes in southern Lebanon killed three people, including a Hezbollah field commander identified by the Israeli army as Ismail Yusaf Baz. Israel said its strikes killed two local Hezbollah commanders and another operative while the group said three of its members were killed. Local Israeli authorities also said three people were wounded in a strike from Lebanon earlier on Tuesday.

On Monday, several Israeli soldiers who crossed into Lebanese territory were wounded when Hezbollah detonated explosive devices, the first such attack in six months of clashes. *—Courtesy, Al Jazeera*

UN seeks support against Israel's demands in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS, 18 APRIL

The head of the UN agency that has helped millions of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank for decades urged the Security Council on Wednesday to ensure its survival as Israel again demanded its dissolution, accusing the agency of becoming part of Hamas' "terror war machine."

Philippe Lazzarini told the council that dismantling the agency known as UNRWA would deepen Gaza's humanitarian crisis and speed up the onset of famine. International experts have warned of imminent famine in northern Gaza and said half the territory's 2.3 million people could be pushed to the brink of starvation if the six-month Israeli-Hamas war intensifies.

Lazzarini said ending the agency's operations also would have other "lasting repercussions" on Gaza, leaving a half million children without education and "fuelling anger, resentment and endless cycles of violence." In addition, it would jeopardise the transition when the war ends by depriving Gaza's population of essential services, including health care, food and other humanitarian aid, he said.

Israeli Ambassador Gilad Erdan claimed, without providing evidence, that UNRWA has been totally infiltrated by Hamas, which controlled Gaza before the war.

He also accused UNRWA of being part of a Palestinian plot to annihilate Israel and becoming "the world's biggest advocate for a one-state solution" run by Palestinians. "Today in Gaza, UNRWA is Hamas and Hamas is UNRWA," Erdan said. *—AP*

Interior Secretary Khurram Agha, submitted a report on the IHC highlighting the "failure of X *PHOTO: PTI*

X working with Pak to 'understand concerns'

ISLAMABAD, 18 APRIL

A day after the Pakistan government told a high court that the popular microblogging website X has been banned in the country due to national security issues, the social media platform for the first time said that it continues to work with the relevant authorities on their concerns.

The Elon Musk-owned social media platform, formerly known as Twitter, was suspended in Pakistan on 17 February when former Rawalpindi commissioner Liaquat Chattha accused the chief election commissioner and the chief justice of being involved in rigging general elections. X's Global Government Affairs team said, "We continue to work with the Pakistani Government to understand their concerns."

The Islamabad High Court (IHC) heard a petition by journalist Ehtisham Abbasi against the disruption in the access to X. Interior Secretary Khurram Agha, submitted a report on the IHC highlighting the "failure of X to adhere to the lawful directives of the government of Pakistan and address concerns regarding the misuse of its platform necessitated the imposition of a ban".

The report said the interior ministry had on February 17 "asked for blocking of X (Twitter) immediately till further orders" on the reports of intelligence agencies. Separately, the Sindh High Court, in a similar hearing, summoned a response from the Interior Ministry on the ban on X by 9 May and ordered it to rescind its February 17 letter within a week, which had disrupted the service. *—PTI*

'NAWAZ SHARIF WILL HOLD TALKS, BUT PTI WON'T'

ISLAMABAD, 18 APRIL

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader, Rana Sanaullah, urged cooperation on Wednesday in order to pull the nation out of its current predicament, stating that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan will not be available for negotiations, but party leader Nawaz Sharif will, ARY News reported.

The former interior minister flatly denied having discussions with major political groups, while speaking to a private channel. Sanaullah emphasised the need for national reconciliation, saying that all "problems could be solved" if Nawaz Sharif, Asif Ali Zardari, Imran Khan, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, MQM-P, and Baloch leadership got together. While announcing that he would never leave the party, he also counselled his party to take responsibility for their actions. The political landscape of Pakistan continues to remain in a deteriorating state amid tiffs between the two major political parties, Imran Khan's PTI, and Nawaz Sharif's PML-N A prominent leader of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Sher Afzal Marwat, has recently announced the party's intention to hold a sit-in demanding the release of its founder from jail. *—ANI*

MIGRANTS SEEK ASYLUM IN US

Men, mainly from India, wait to be processed after crossing the border between Mexico and the United States as they seek asylum *PHOTO: AP/PTI*

Ukraine warns of wider war ahead of US aid vote

KIYV, 18 APRIL

Ukraine's Prime Minister has told BBC there will be a "Third World War" if Ukraine loses its conflict with Russia, as he urged the US Congress to pass a long-stalled foreign aid bill.

Denys Shmyhal expressed "careful optimism" that US lawmakers would pass the hotly contested measure, which has $61bn (£49bn) earmarked for Kyiv. The House of Representatives is set to vote on the package this Saturday.

The proposal includes funding for Israel as well as the Indo-Pacific. Speaking to BBC in Washington DC on Wednesday, Prime Minister Shmyhal said of the US security assistance: "We need this money yesterday, not tomorrow, not today."

"If we will not protect... Ukraine will fall," he added. "So the global, the global system of security will be destroyed... and all the world will need to find... a new system of security.

"Or, there will be many conflicts, many such kinds of wars, and in the end of the day, it could lead to the Third World War."

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal shake hands at IMF-World Bank 2024 Spring Meetings *PHOTO: PTI*

This is not the first time Ukraine has issued such an alarming warning about the consequences of its potential defeat.

But Kremlin officials have ridiculed such claims as Western scaremongering. Last month President Vladimir Putin dismissed suggestions that Russia might one day attack Eastern Europe as "complete nonsense".

Russia has never attacked a country within NATO, which includes Poland. NATO's collective defence pact means that an attack on one member constitutes an attack on all. In Wednesday's interview, Prime Minister Shmyhal was asked about a recent claim by Republican House Foreign Affairs Chairman Michael McCaul that members of his own party were being "infected" by Russian propaganda. *—BBC News*

Major disruption grips Dubai airport

DUBAI, 18 APRIL

A bus stands abandoned in pouring rain as the sky turns green as a storm hits Dubai *PHOTO: AP*

Operations at Dubai airport remain severely disrupted as heavy rains continue to batter the United Arab Emirates and neighbouring countries.

The storm pounded the UAE on Tuesday, flooding roads and the sections of the busy international airport. Flash floods have now killed 20 people in Oman and one in the UAE. Some inbound flights have resumed on Thursday, but on the whole Dubai international airport, a major travel hub, is barely functional.

Authorities at the world's second-busiest airport said on Thursday that they had started receiving inbound flights at Terminal 1, used by foreign carriers, but that outbound flights continue to be delayed. They later announced that check-in was open at Terminal 3 for Emirates - the single largest carrier at the airport, and flydubai flights. *—BBC News*

IN INDONESIA

Volcano eruption fears forces evacuations

MANADO, 18 APRIL

Sitaro Regional Disaster Management, hot molten lava glows at the crater of Mount Ruang as it erupts in Sanguine Islands, Indonesia *PHOTO: PTI*

Indonesian authorities closed an airport and residents left homes near an erupting volcano Thursday due to the dangers of spreading ash, falling rocks, hot volcanic clouds and the possibility of a tsunami.

People have been ordered to stay at least 6 kilometres (3.7 miles) from the 725-metre (2,378 foot) mountain. More than 11,000 people live in the affected area and were told to leave.

At least 800 have done so. Mount Ruang on the northern side of Sulawesi Island had at least five large eruptions Wednesday, causing the Centre for Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation to issue its highest level alert, indicating an active eruption.

The crater emitted white-gray smoke continuously during the day Thursday, reaching more than 500 metres (1,640 feet) above the peak. An international airport in Manado city was temporarily closed Thursday as volcanic ash was spewed into the air.

"We have to close flight operations at Sam Ratulangi Airport due to the spread of volcanic ash, which could endanger flight safety," said Ambar Suryoko, head of the regional airport authority. The volcanology centre noted the risks from the volcanic eruption include the possibility that part of the volcano could collapse into the sea and cause a tsunami.

"People who live in the Tagulandang Island area and are within a 6-kilometre radius must be immediately evacuated to a safe place outside the 6-kilometre radius, and especially those who live near the coast should be aware of the potential for incandescent rocks to erupt, hot clouds and tsunami waves that could be triggered by the collapse of a volcanic body into the sea," Abdul Muhari, spokesperson of the National Disaster Mitigation Agency, said on Thursday.

The agency said residents will be relocated to Manado, the nearest city, on Sulawesi island, a journey of six hours by boat.

Volcanic eruptions have triggered past tsunamis in Indonesia, including an 1871 eruption at Mount Ruang and the 2018 eruption of the Anak Krakatau volcano. *—AP*

Hush money trial: Jury faces pivotal stretch

WASHINGTON, 18 APRIL

Jury selection in the hush money trial of Donald Trump enters a pivotal and potentially final stretch Thursday as lawyers look to round out the panel of New Yorkers that will decide the first-ever criminal case against a former president. Seven jurors have been picked so far, including an oncology nurse, a software engineer, an information technology professional, a sales professional, an English teacher and two lawyers. Eleven more people must still be sworn in, with the judge saying he anticipated opening statements in the landmark case to be given as early as next week.

The seating of the Manhattan jury — whenever it comes — will be a seminal moment in the case, setting the stage for a trial that will place the former president's legal jeopardy at the heart of the campaign against Democrat Joe Biden and feature potentially unflattering testimony about Trump's private life in the years before he became President. The process of picking a jury is a critical phase of any criminal trial but especially so when the defendant is a former president and the presumptive Republican nominee. Prospective jurors have been grilled on their social media posts, personal lives and political views as the lawyers and judge search for biases that would prevent them from being impartial.

Inside the court, there's broad acknowledgment of the futility in trying to find jurors without knowledge of Trump, with a prosecutor this week saying that lawyers were not looking for people who had been "living under a rock for the past eight years."

To that end, at least some of the jurors selected acknowledged having their own opinions about Trump. *—AP*

Rupee rises 6 paise to close at 83.55 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 18 APRIL

The rupee rebounded from its all-time low levels and appreciated 6 paise to close at 83.55 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, as the American currency and brent crude oil prices retreated from their elevated levels. At the inter-bank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.51 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 83.49. The domestic unit finally settled at 83.55 (provisional) against the dollar, 6 paise higher from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee plunged 17 paise to hit its lowest level of 83.61 against the US dollar for the second time in four weeks.

Forex and money markets were closed on Wednesday on account of 'Ram Navami'. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.07 per cent lower at 105.87. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.93 per cent to USD 86.48 per barrel. On the domestic equity market front, both the benchmark indices witnessed heavy volatility. *—PTI*

Gold falls ₹250 to ₹73,700 per 10 gram

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Gold prices fell from an all-time high level and traded lower by Rs 250 at Rs 73,700 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a decline in the yellow metal's rates in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had settled at Rs 73,950 per 10 grams in the previous session. However, silver prices remained flat at Rs 86,500 per kg. Commodity markets were closed on Wednesday on account of Ram Navami. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,375 per ounce. *—PTI*

Talbros Automotive JV secures order worth ₹1,000cr

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Talbros Automotive Components on Thursday said its joint venture firm has secured a multi-year contract valued at around Rs 1,000 crore from a European original equipment manufacturer (OEM). The order is to be executed over a period of next eight years commencing from the fourth quarter of this fiscal, the company said in a regulatory filing. The order has been secured by the company's joint venture firm -- Marelli Talbros Chassis Systems (MTCS). The order is centered on the supply of suspension arms tailored for both conventional internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles and new-age electric vehicle (EV) platforms, the company said. The production for the same would be done from the Pune plant of MTCS for which a capex investment of Rs 65 crore is envisaged in FY25, it added. The investments would be done through internal accruals and debt, the company said. Last year, the company and its JV

Nissan Magnite units recalled over faulty door handle sensors

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Nissan Motor India on Thursday said it is voluntarily recalling Magnite units produced between November 2020 and December 2023 for a retrofit of front door handle sensors. The company did not share the number of affected units. This proactive and mandatory preventive action impacts the base XE and mid XL variants only, with no impact to the safety of customers, the automaker said in a statement on its website. All Nissan Magnite units manufactured after December 2023 remain unaffected, it added. The automaker said it will begin notifying the owners of the affected vehicles and assured them that they can continue using their vehicles without interruption. Customers can visit their nearest authorised Nissan service workshop, where a retrofit of the sensor will be performed free of charge, it added. Nissan Magnite is a five seater compact sports utility vehicle.*—PTI*

Markets settle lower taking downtrend to 4th day

Nifty declines 152.05 points or 0.69 per cent to 21,995.85

MUMBAI, 18 APRIL

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty faced heavy volatility on Thursday and ended lower, taking their losing streak to the fourth straight session, dragged by bank stocks and foreign fund outflows.

Concerns over fading rate cut hopes and persisting FII fund exodus from domestic equities also dampened investors' sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined abruptly post noon, reflecting heavy fluctuations, wiping out all its early gains. It tanked 454.69 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 72,488.99. During the day, it gyrated 1,107.38 points between the day's high and low.

The benchmark quoted 73,135.5 at 13:31 hours but within two minutes it declined to 72,817.03 at 13.34 hours, reflecting a drop of 318.47 points. NSE Nifty declined 152.05 points or 0.69 per cent to 21,995.85. It hit a high of 22,326.50 and a low of 21,961.70 during the day.

From the Sensex basket, Nestle declined the most by over 5 per cent amid reports that the global FMCG major sold infant milk products with more sugar content in less developed countries.

Titan Company, Axis Bank, NTPC, Tata Motors, ITC, Tech Mahindra, Bajaj Finserv, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank and Bajaj Finance were the other laggards.

Bharti Airtel, Infosys and Larsen & Toubro were the gainers ***PHOTO: PTI***

Bharti Airtel, Infosys and Larsen & Toubro were among the gainers.

"Domestic benchmarks extended losses amid mixed sentiments, emerged from escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, and as hopes of US rate cuts waned. Meanwhile, investors will closely monitor the Q4 outcomes for further directions," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory.

European markets were trading mostly with gains. Wall Street ended lower on Wednesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.63 per cent to USD 86.74 a barrel. "Markets witnessed frenzied selling towards the closing stages in a highly volatile trading session, as concerns over fading rate cut hopes and persisting FII fund exodus from local stocks dampened investors' sentiment. Stock markets were closed on Wednesday for Ram Navami. The 30-share BSE benchmark tanked 456.10 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 72,943.68 on Tuesday. The NSE Nifty declined 124.60 points or 0.56 per cent to finish at 22,147.90. *—PTI*

Ambuja Cements shares climb nearly 4%; hits 52-week high

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Shares of Ambuja Cements on Thursday climbed nearly 4 per cent after billionaire Gautam Adani's family infused an additional Rs 8,339 crore in the firm to help the cement maker's manufacturing capacity.The stock jumped 3.88 per cent to Rs 640.95 -- its 52-week high -- on the BSE.At the NSE, it climbed 3.27 per cent to Rs 637.80 apiece. Adani's family infused an additional Rs 8,339 crore in Ambuja Cements, raising its stake in the company to 70.3 per cent, to help the cement maker's manufacturing capacity.The Adani family previously invested Rs 5,000 crore in the company on 18 October, 2022, and Rs 6,661 crore on 28 March, 2024. *—PTI*

5% DROP

Nestle shares drop after report on excess sugar

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

PHOTO: PTI

Shares of Nestle India have taken a sharp hit Thursday after a Swiss-based organisation made charges against the multi-national food company of adding sugar to infant food products.

At 2.45 pm, the shares of Nestle India were 3.6 per cent down at Rs 2,454. Its intraday low was at Rs 2,410.

The centre has taken cognizance of the charges made against a multi-national food company.

The investigation done by Public Eye, a Swiss investigative organisation reveals that despite stringent guidelines by the World Health Organization's (WHO) banning added sugars in baby food products, Nestle's baby food product Cerelac has been found to contain an average of nearly 3 grams of sugar per serving in India.

Nestle responding to ANI queries said, "We believe in the nutritional quality of our products for early childhood and prioritize using high-quality ingredients.

Over the past 5 years, Nestle India has reduced added sugars by up to 30%, depending on the variant, in our infant cereals portfolio (milk cereal based complementary food). We regularly review our portfolio and continue to innovate and reformulate our products to further reduce the level of added sugars without compromising on quality, safety and taste."

The report, however, claims Nestle has violated WHO guidelines against adding honey or sugar in baby food products not only in India but also in many Asian, African and Latin American countries.

The report says that out of the 15 Indian Cerelac products tested, laboratory analyses revealed that each serving of cereal contained more than 2.7 gm of added sugar.

While Nestle's labelling highlights the nutrients, added sugar is not as transparently displayed.

The investigation has examined 115 Nestle products across markets in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and revealed that 108 of them contained added sugar. *—ANI*

REVENUE GROWTH EXPECTED

Infosys profit jumps 30% to ₹7,969 crore in Q4

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

IT company Infosys on Thursday said its consolidated profit jumped 30 per cent to Rs 7,969 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 2024. The company posted a profit of Rs 6,128 crore in the same period a year ago, according to a regulatory filing.

The consolidated revenue of Infosys during the reported quarter increased by 1.3 per cent to Rs 37,923 crore from Rs 37,441 crore in the same quarter a year ago.

The company expects a revenue growth of 1-3 per cent in constant currency for financial year 2025. During the financial year ended March 2024, net profit increased by 8.9 per cent to Rs 26,233 crore from Rs 24,095 crore recorded in FY23.

The annual income from operations increased by 4.7 cent to Rs 1,53,670 crore in fiscal year 2024 from Rs 1,46,767 crore a year ago. Infosys board recommended a final dividend of Rs 20 per equity share for FY24 and additionally a special dividend of Rs 8 per equity share. The company also announced that it will acquire 100 per cent stake in German firm in-tech in an all cash deal for 450 million euros. *—PTI*

Annual income from operations increased by 4.7 cent to Rs 1,53,670 crore in fiscal year 2024 from Rs 1,46,767 crore a year ago ***PHOTO: PTI***

India exports 4.8M tonnes oilmeal animal feed

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

India exported a record 48.86 tonnes of oilmeal -- used as animal feed -- during the 2023-24 financial year on revival of shipments of soyabean meal, industry body SEA said on Thursday.

In value terms also, the country's oilmeal exports were highest at Rs 15,368 crore during 2023-24 fiscal.

The previous record was 43.81 lakh tonnes achieved in 2013-14 fiscal, while in value terms shipments stood at Rs 11,500 crore.

"This is the highest export of oilmeals since 2013-14 in terms of quantity and value," the Solvent Extractors Association of India (SEA) said in a statement.

The overall export of oilmeals during the April-March period of 2023-24 fiscal was highest at 48.86 lakh tonnes, up by 13 per cent from 43.36 lakh tonnes in the previous year.

Among major importers of Indian oilmeal, Bangladesh topped with shipments of 8.92

PHOTO: PTI

lakh tonnes oilmeal, consisting of 4.34 lakh tonnes of rapeseed meal, 4.31 lakh tonnes of soybean meal and 0.28 lakh tonnes of de-oiled rice bran.

South Korea became the second largest importer of Indian oilmeals at 8.32 lakh tonnes, consisting of 5.47 lakh tonnes of rapeseed meal, 2.26 lakh tonnes of castorseed meal and 57,899 tonnes of soybean meal.

Thailand was the third largest importer of Indian oilmeals at 6.33 lakh tonnes, out of which 6.16 lakh tonnes rapeseed meal. *—PTI*

FRESENIUS KABI FILES PLAINT AGAINST NATCO PHARMA IN US

HYDERABAD, 18 APRIL

Natco Pharma on Thursday said a complaint has been filed against it at a district court in the US by Fresenius Kabi over the marketing of Diazepam injection prefilled syringe in the country. Fresenius Kabi USA, LLC and Fresenius Kabi Deutschland GmbH have filed a complaint against Natco Pharma USA LLC (erstwhile Dash Pharmaceuticals LLC) in the District Court of Delaware relating to the marketing of Dash Pharmaceuticals' Diazepam Injection prefilled syringe in the United States, the company said in a regulatory filing.

Dash Pharmaceuticals LLC had been acquired by Natco Pharma, Inc and had changed its name to Natco Pharma USA LLC. Natco Pharma intends to defend the matter accordingly, the company said. Diazepam injection is indicated in the treatment of anxiety, muscle spasms, and alcohol withdrawal. *—PTI*

Ashok Leyland partners with South Indian Bank for dealer financing

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Commercial vehicle maker Ashok Leyland Ltd on Thursday said it has partnered with South Indian Bank for financing dealers.

The company has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to provide financing to dealers under the bank's dealer finance programme, Ashok Leyland said in a statement.

Under this partnership, the bank will provide competitive dealer finance options to the dealers, it added.

PHOTO: PTI

"This alliance will offer appropriate inventory financing solutions to our network of dealers," Ashok Leyland Director and CFO Gopal Mahadevan said.

South Indian Bank Senior General Manager & Group Business Head, Biji SS said this partnership will meet the business needs of both organisations and create a strong positive impact.

"Through our varied financial solutions, our goal is to offer convenient and complete financing choices to the dealers," she added. *—PTI*

Swiggy to integrate Instamart & Mall

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Food tech giant Swiggy on Thursday said it will integrate Swiggy Mall with its quick commerce offering Instamart, to broaden the choice for consumers looking to purchase products other than groceries and staples.

Swiggy Mall, which is currently operational in parts of Bengaluru, marked the company's foray into online retail.

The company said Swiggy Instamart is already present in more than 25 cities allowing Swiggy Mall to scale up over the coming months, starting with Bengaluru.

"Swiggy Instamart is broad-

PHOTO: PTI

ening its offerings to include an even wider array of products. With our latest update, customers can now explore an extensive selection across over 35 categories, that go way beyond groceries and home essentials, delivered in minutes.

"This marks a significant milestone in our journey towards providing unparalleled convenience, ensuring our users have everything they need at their fingertips, faster than ever before," said Head of Swiggy Instamart, Phani Kishan.

In a blog post, the company stated the integration will further broaden the choice for consumers, who are showing an increasing predilection to purchase products other than groceries and staples from Swiggy Instamart. *—PTI*

IN FOCUS

India's DPI will drive global future: Kant

MUMBAI, 18 APRIL

India's G-20 sherpa Amitabh Kant on Thursday said the global future will not be driven by big technology firms but by the digital public infrastructure platforms developed locally.

Speaking at the 'We Made in India' event here, Kant said India will transfer its digital public infrastructure (DPI) to the rest of the world, and already there are many examples of countries warming up to the same.

DPI consists of the digital identity through Aadhaar, real time payment through the UPI platform and other services like account aggregator, and was showcased to the world during India's presidency of G-20 last year.

Kant said during the G-20, the world accepted the definition and framework of the DPI, given the strides that India has made through its strategies. "During G-20, the world accepted the definition of digital public infra, the world accepted the framework of DPI and to our belief, the future will not be driven by big tech, it will be driven by DPI," he said.

Amitabh Kant ***PHOTO: PTI***

It can be noted that 'big tech' generally refers to a set of global tech majors like Apple, Google's owner Alphabet, Amazon and Meta.

- Kant said India's DPI will transfer to the world, and the same will present a lot of opportunities for the country's entrepreneurs which need to be leveraged on

Kant said India's DPI will transfer to the world, and the same will present a lot of opportunities for the country's entrepreneurs which need to be leveraged on.

"DPI will become synonymous with the rest of the world," he said, adding this will be a big part of the India growth story during the period till 2047. Meanwhile, the former bureaucrat urged insurance companies and pension funds to make investments in the country's 'start-up movement', pointing out that the Silicon Valley ecosystem, which is home to the big tech companies, has been built on the bets taken by such patient investors.

Kant said at present, over three-fourths of the funding for domestic startups is coming from international sources while only a fourth comes from domestic sources, including the high net worth individuals.

He also underscored the need for a fund of funds for deep tech sector in India, which will help venture capital funds take the bets in start-ups engaged in the sector with a lot of relevance in the future. *—PTI*

Google fires 28 workers over anti-Israel protest

CALIFORNIA, 18 APRIL

Google fired 28 employees on Wednesday after a number of workers at the company participated in a sit-in protest against its cloud contract with the Israeli government, a day after nine staffers were suspended and then arrested for participating in the protest.

The company announced the firings in an internal memo alleging the protesting workers "took over office spaces, defaced our property, and physically impeded the work of other Googlers."

The protests took place on Tuesday at Google's Sunnyvale and New York offices

They claimed the firings were indiscriminate as they included people who did not directly participate in the protests. The affected workers were protesting Google and Amazon's $1.2 billion cloud

PHOTO: PTI

computing contract with the Israeli government Both companies have faced some internal pushback against the contract, but the issue has been pushed into the foreground following Israel's invasion of Gaza following a terror attack by Hamas last October. Google workers organized a sit-in protest at the company's offices in New York and Sunnyvale. At least nine protesting workers were arrested by police in Sunnyvale on Tuesday and suspended by the company.

Courtesy, Forbes

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE - SF LEG 2

Dead defence: Madrid switch style to beat City

Real Madrid beat Manchester City 4-3 on penalties

MANCHESTER, 18 APRIL

Real Madrid weathered the storm, silenced the crowd and ultimately ended Manchester City's brief hold on the Champions League.

The all-time kings of Europe moved a step closer to a record-extending 15th title in the competition they have dominated after a 4-3 win Wednesday on penalties at Etihad Stadium.

But not before being pushed to the limit by defending champion City. "I was pretty much dead on my feet at the end," Madrid midfielder Jude Bellingham said.

The game had gone to the uncertainty of a shootout after ending 1-1 on the night and 4-4 on aggregate. City dominated the chances after going behind to Rodrygo's goal in the 12th minute, but only had Kevin de Bruyne's leveler in the 76th to show for its superiority.

That counted for little as Antonio Rudiger struck the decisive spot kick after Bernardo Silva and Mateo Kovacic both saw their penalties saved.

Guardiola accepted his team had failed to capitalise against a Madrid team that was forced to defend deep against wave of attacks. "I have to say thank you to these players from deep in my heart because the way they played. But football is about winning and we didn't do enough, yet we were exceptional," City manager Pep Guardiola said.

Collecting a high ball just past the halfway line, he shook off the attention of Rodri with a deft touch to wrong-foot his opponent. The ball was worked to Vinícius Junior on the right who crossed to Rodrygo, who beat Ederson at the second attempt after his first shot was saved.

That pressure eventually paid off when De Bruyne levelled the game, lifting the ball high into the net after Rudiger could only partially clear a cross from substitute Jeremy Doku. With no further goals in extra time, the game went to a shootout and City immediately seized the advantage after Julian Alvarez converted his opening penalty and Luka Modric's effort was saved.

But Madrid goalkeeper Andriy Lunin then saved successive spot kicks from Silva and Kovacic to swing the balance in the visitors' favour.

Silva's attempt was right down the middle and easily caught chest-high by Lunin.

It came down to Rudiger to take the winning kick that sent Madrid fans wild and City supporters home.

—AP

Real Madrid players react after scoring goal from the last penaly shootout in Etihad Stadium on Thursday **PHOTO: X/@REALMADRID**

	MANC	RM
Shots	33	8
Shots on target	9	3
Posession	68%	32%
Passes	920	457
Passes Pass Accuracy	91%	81%
Corners	18	1

Kimmich header secures last-4 spot for Bayern

Bayern Munich reach semifinals with 3-2 aggregate win

MUNICH, 18 APRIL

Bayern Munich could yet crown a disappointing season with the Champions League title. Arsenal faces the prospect of ending a promising season with no trophy.

Joshua Kimmich's header powered Bayern to a 1-0 win over Arsenal on Wednesday to reach the Champions League semifinals with a 3-2 victory on aggregate. With the score at 2-2 from the first leg in London, Kimmich's header off Raphael Guerreiro's pinpoint cross put Bayern ahead in the 63rd minute as Bayern largely neutralized the English team's attack.

Arsenal's players were "gutted," manager Mikel Arteta told broadcaster TNT Sports. "I cannot find the right words to lift them." Bayern kept alive its hopes of finishing the season with a trophy three days after Bayer Leverkusen ended Bayern's 11-year reign as German champion. Striker Harry Kane — who spoke Tuesday of being motivated by his release from Arsenal as a youth player — takes a step closer to what would be the first trophy of his career.

Tuchel said it meant "really a lot" to beat Arsenal. "The semifinals are an important step, the last four, that was fun," he told broadcaster DAZN.

Bayern and Arsenal have been drawn together five times in the knockout stages of the Champions League since 2005 and the German team has eliminated Arsenal on each occasion.

Arsenal was left to rue the defensive errors that cost the team in the first leg. After a first half full of inconclusive midfield battles — Tuchel called it "a chess game" — the contest came to life after the break when Bayern hit the frame of the goal twice in a matter of seconds. Leon Goretzka sent a header against the bar and Guerreiro followed up with a shot that was deflected onto the post.

Arsenal struggled to make any headway against Bayern's defence and sometimes looked disjointed at the back, especially when defender Takehiro Tomiyasu risked an own goal with a misjudged pass that went behind for a corner. Kimmich darted into the box unmarked to score the only goal of the game after Guerreiro's quick footwork on the touchline allowed him to cross past the onrushing Arsenal defender Ben White.

Arsenal was awarded a free kick in a dangerous position with seconds of stoppage time left to play and opted to take it quickly.

—AP

Bayern players celebrate after scoring goal **PHOTO: X/@FCBAYERNEN**

	BAY	ARS
Shots	15	8
Shots on target	3	3
Posession	52%	48%
Passes	480	455
Passes Pass Accuracy	86%	89%
Corners	8	3

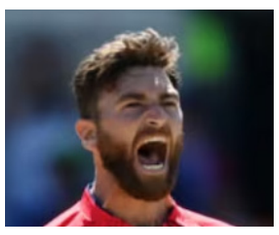


PHOTO: AFP

CSK ropes in Gleeson to replace Conway

CHENNAI, 18 APRIL

Defending champions Chennai Super Kings named English pacer Richard Gleeson as their replacement for injured New Zealand opener Devon Conway. The Black Caps southpaw had suffered a fractured left thumb during the T20 International series against Australia in February and had undergone surgery for the same. Anticipated to be out for eight weeks, Conway's unavailability for the season was confirmed even before the tournament started.*—PTI*

PHOTO: AFP

Sreeshankar ruled out of Olympics, to undergo surgery

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Ace Indian long jumper Murali Sreeshankar has been ruled out of the Paris Olympics after sustaining a knee injury during training that would require surgery, which will also see him miss the entire 2024 season. Sreeshankar, an Asian Games and Commonwealth Games silver medallist had cut for the Paris Olympics after recording an 8.37m jump en route to a silver medal at the 2023.*—PTI*

LSG face stern home test against CSK

LUCKNOW, 18 APRIL

A set of probing questionnaires awaits the Lucknow Super Giants on their home turf as Chennai Super Kings' cerebral bowling unit will look to use its variation to the fullest on a two-paced Ekana Stadium track during their IPL clash here on Friday.

The two teams endured contrasting fortunes in their previous couple of matches. While Ruturaj Gaikwad's team, still 'marshalled' by the peerless Mahendra Singh Dhoni, is coming into the game with back-to-back victories, LSG under KL Rahul has endured a mini-slump with successive defeats.

With LSG's batting unit not exactly inspiring the highest level of confidence despite its firepower, it remains to be seen how it tackles an attack where each bowler brings something different to the table.

CSK's MS Dhoni, LSG's K L Rahul **PHOTO: PTI**

Matheesha Pathirana, with his yorkers, is unplayable at the death, while Mustafizur Rahman has at least three variations of cutters, including one with scrambled seam.

Ravindra Jadeja, on tracks where the ball grips like it often happens at the Ekana, could be more than a handful. At Lucknow, it could be an option to play the extra spinner in Maheesh Theekshana to make full use of the conditions.

TODAY'S MATCH

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Ekana Sports City, Lucknow

The average first innings score in Lucknow this season has been 175, which is at least 15 sub-par compared to some of the other grounds, and this is exactly the kind of total where Dhoni, like the seasoned 'Concert Master' of an orchestra team, controls the 'pitch and tune'.

Lucknow, on the other hand, have had issues with injuries. Their young pace sensation Mayank Yadav had to sit out of the last two games after suffering lower abdominal strain after playing just two and a quarter games.

—PTI

CANDIDATES CHESS

Gukesh slips to tied 2nd after draw; losses for Pragg,

TORONTO, 18 APRIL

Grandmaster D Gukesh played out a creditable draw against top seed Fabiano Caruana but slipped a rung to the joint second position on a day when two other Indians endured frustrating losses in the Candidates Chess Tournament's 11th round here. Nerves finally came into play as R Praggnanandhaa and Vidit Gujrathi lost their way against American Hikaru Nakamura and Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi respectively.

But 17-year-old Gukesh held his own against Caruana. In the other encounter, Frenchman Firouza Alireza proved superior to Nijat Abasov of Azerbaijan.

With just three rounds remaining, the die seems to be cast in favour of Nepomniachtchi, who is gunning for his third straight Candidates title.

The Russian, who has to compete under the FIDE flag here owing to his country's international suspension, shot back to sole lead on seven points out of a possible 11 and it would be difficult for other contestants to get past him.

Caruana, Nakamura and Gukesh are in pursuit of the leader half a point behind in the standings. Praggnanandhaa and Gujrathi have fallen apart with 5.5 and five points respectively. Coming back from behind is Alireza, who probably has no contest from Abasov in the bottom half.w

—PTI

D Gukesh **PHOTO: PTI**

OLYMPICS SELECTION

Trials for Indian shooters

NEW DELHI, 18 APRIL

Olympian Manu Bhaker and Esha Singh will be firm favorites to top the Olympic trials in 25m sports pistol when the process to select India's pistol and rifle squad for 2024 Paris gets underway at the Karni Singh Range here on Friday.

The opening day of the Olympic Selection Trials 1&2 (OST) will also see Anish Bhanwala and Vijayveer Sidhu establish their supremacy in the 25m rapid-fire event in the five-shooter field.The Trial 1 finals in both women's sports pistol and men's rapid-fire events will be held on 20 April, while the Trial 2 finals will take place on April 22.Trials will be held across eight pistol and rifle disciplines from April 19-27 here after which action will shift to Bhopal where Trials 3&4 are scheduled from May 10-19.

Shooters topping the trials will book their tickets to the Paris Olympics. The best three scores in the four trials will be considered for Paris team selection.

PHOTO: PTI

In the 25m sports pistol, Manu and Esha will be challenged by the second Olympic quota winner Rhythm Sangwan, Abhidnya Ashok Patil, and Simranpreet Kaur Brar.In 25m rapid-fire pistol, Anish, who narrowly missed qualifying for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, would be eyeing a Paris berth after having secured a quota place for the country.Anish and Vijayveer, the second quota winner in rapid fire, will be challenged by Adarsh Singh, Bhavesh Shekhawat, and Ankur Goel in the four trials.

The National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) will add two bonus points to the scores of shooters who have won Olympic quota places for the country in 25m pistol and 50m rifle events, while one bonus point will be added to the scores of 10m air pistol and rifle shooters after the trials.The top two shooters with the best scores among the five contenders will make the Paris cut."

The OSTs (Olympic Selection Trials) will follow the declared Paris Olympic schedule where the finals will happen the day after qualifications. Also, eliminations in the finals will proceed normally and the fifth shooter will be the first to exit at his or her regular stage of elimination," said an NRAI release.

—PTI

BARCELONA FINED BY UEFA

NYON, 18 APRIL

Barcelona was fined 25,000 euros ($26,600) by UEFA on Thursday for Nazi salutes and monkey gestures by fans at a Champions League game against Paris Saint-Germain last week.

UEFA said the proven charge of "racist behavior" followed images circulating of misconduct by some fans at Parc des Princes on April 10.

UEFA also deferred a one-game ban on selling tickets to Barcelona fans for an away game in the Champions League next season for a probationary period of one year.

Barcelona also was ordered to compensate PSG for damage to seats by fans and pay additional fines totaling 7,000 euros ($7,500).

Barcelona won 3-2 in Paris in the first leg of the quarterfinals but was eliminated Tuesday after losing 4-1 in the home leg. World soccer body FIFA is set to launch a new drive against racism next month.

—PTI

Paris Olympics opening ceremony on the river

PARIS, 18 APRIL

With sunset and moonlight gleaming on the river, the grandiose opening ceremony for the Paris Olympics will last nearly four hours.A total of 205 delegations will parade on more than 80 boats on the Seine.

The ceremony will drift slowly from east to west, bridge to bridge, snaking six kilometers (3.7 miles) from Pont d'Austerlitz to Pont d'Iéna.Proceedings begin at 3:45 p.m. and finish at 11:15 p.m. local time with artistic performances preceding the athletes' parade.

The athletes will motor past about 320,000 fans wedged in behind security cordons on upper and lower tiers on the embankments. Others will gaze at giant screens beaming images of the ambitious ceremony."For one evening, the Seine will be transformed into a giant open-air ceremony," Paris Games director of ceremonies Marie-Catherine Ettori said during a media briefing on Thursday. Once the 10,500 athletes have disembarked from their boats, the final part of the ceremony takes place at the Trocadéro.

—PTI